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Cross-border student mobility and improvements in the philippine tertiary education program relevance and learning outcomes

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DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES NO. 2024-21

Cross-Border Student Mobility and Improvements in the Philippine Tertiary Education Program Relevance and Learning Outcomes

*Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy, Paola Ellaine D. Luzon,
and Suzanne J. Zambrano*



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in the Philippine Tertiary Education Program Relevance
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Abstract

Mainly using qualitative data, this paper analyzes whether and how cross-border student mobility contributes to enhanced Philippine tertiary education programs. The paper recognizes that the intake of international students is a product resulting from cross-border and home-based internationalization initiatives that are mutually reinforcing to improve programs and learning outcomes. The intake of international students further improves home-based internationalization initiatives, thus creating a virtuous cycle of effective initiatives, relevant educational products, and increased foreign student intake. However, the virtuous cycle has yet to materialize in the country due to its weak presence in the international student market. Currently, the country's inbound students are limited to specific nationalities, fewer than in other destination countries, and largely facilitated by educational agencies. While the ultimate objective is to improve the higher education programs and learning outcomes for Filipino learners' benefits, an increasingly sustained market share of international students seeking the country for its high-quality instructions and relevant fields of interest is a validation that the country's internationalization efforts have paid off. To realize these, the paper forwards recommendations in the bigger context of sustaining an HEI ecosystem responsive to local and international standards.

Keywords: quality in tertiary education, cross-border student mobility, internationalization, benchmarking, partnerships

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**Connie Bayudan-Dacuycuy, Paola Ellaine D. Luzon,
and Suzanne J. Zambrano¹**

1. Introduction

Global and regional developments related to the deepening interconnectedness of economies and cultures, advancements in information and communication technology, the rise of knowledge-based economies, and the growing demand for diverse skill sets in the global job market put the spotlight on the internationalization of higher education. Internationalization has significantly evolved encompassing not only academic mobility but international graduate education, research, and “relations between cultures and between realities at the global and local levels” (Knight and De Wit 2018, p.3). This shift can be observed in most developed economies, which offer clear employment and migration prospects.

Despite the shift, cross-border student mobility remains a popular approach to cross-border internationalization and has been leveraged in developing intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Luo and Jamison-Drake 2013). Evidence in the US and Australia shows the importance of cross-national interactions in students’ emotional and cognitive development (Parsons 2013). Evidence in the US also indicates that the presence of international students can drive curriculum internationalization and enhance learning outcomes by enriching education with diverse perspectives and fostering intercultural understanding and critical thinking among all students (Leask 2015) and encouraging educators to adopt innovative and inclusive strategies in the design and delivery of curricula (Yefanova and Johnstone 2015).

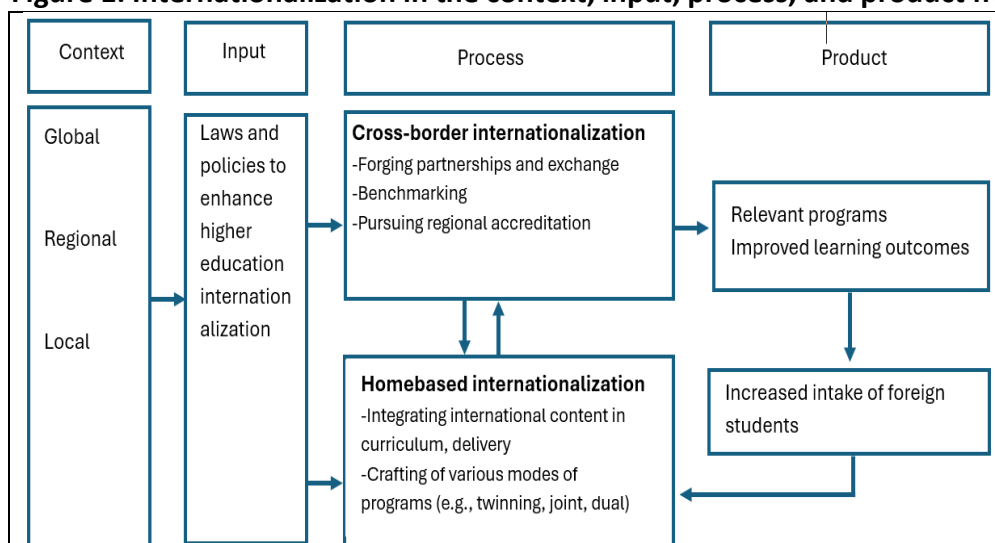
In the Philippines, the internationalization level of higher education institutions (HEIs) is, at best, uneven, with some still working on forging partnerships and others already at the helm of accreditation and quality assurance initiatives at the ASEAN level. Earlier evidence on home-based internationalization through curriculum transformation indicated a positive impact on the skills and competencies of students and teachers in the Philippines (Robiños and Alcazaren 2023). Whether and how cross-border student mobility affects the quality of programs and learning outcomes in HEIs needs to be clarified, especially since the number of Philippine inbound students is limited. Thus, this paper examines the following research questions: *Does cross-border student mobility improve the quality of tertiary education programs? Does it contribute to enhanced learning outcomes and program relevance?*

To answer these questions, the paper recognizes that student mobility occurs in the global, regional, and local contexts of internationalization (Figure 1). These contexts usher laws and policies facilitating home-based and cross-border internationalization. The former integrates international content into curriculum, processes, and activities. The latter involves the cross-border movement of people and collaboration in programs and institutions. The two types of internationalization are necessarily linked. Cross-internationalization through partnerships, exchanges, benchmarking, and pursuing regional accreditation helps integrate international

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content into curriculum and delivery. Meanwhile, the latter can enhance partnerships and human resource mobility. Taken together, cross-border and home-based internationalization initiatives can improve the quality of HEIs, which can attract international students, the presence of whom can further improve home-based internationalization. These create a virtuous cycle of effective initiatives and relevant educational products.

Figure 1: Internationalization in the context, input, process, and product framework



The study adopts the context, input, process, and product framework to answer the research questions above (see Table 1 for tasks and resources). It employs a mixed-methods approach, which requires quantitative and qualitative methods to understand patterns, benefits, and challenges associated with internationalization initiatives.

Table 1: Tasks and data to analyze the context, input, process, and product

	Tasks	Resources/data
Context	Examine how the country fares in internationalization against its ASEAN neighbors. Examine patterns in inbound students at the global, ASEAN, and Philippine levels	Secondary data such as desk reviews, CHED administrative data, and data from the Institute for Statistics-UNESCO and Institute of International Education-Project Atlas Database
Input	Examine the Philippine policies and regulations related to cross-border internationalization	Executive Orders and Laws
Product	Examine strategies for and benefits and challenges of cross-border internationalization	Primary data via key informant interviews (KII)
Process		

Primary data were collected through interviews with representatives of HEIs that host the greatest number of international students. KII invitation letters were sent to the top 20 HEI hosts through the institutions' presidents and/or heads of internationalization offices. Ten of the 20 HEIs—nine private and one public—accepted the invitation and participated in the KIIs. Additional public HEI hosts were invited to broaden the discussion, resulting in two additional interviews. The 17 participants comprised university presidents, vice presidents for external relations and internationalization, student services, and academic affairs, directors and OICs for international relations offices, and other university administrators (Table 2). KII invitations were extended to the international students of the respondent HEIs. The invitation period coincided with graduation rites and academic breaks for most HEIs, resulting in only one focus group discussion with three international students from India, Nigeria, and Russia.

Table 2. Key informant interview respondents

Type of respondent	Number of interviews	Number of participants	Positions
Private HEI	9	14	3 – University Presidents 1 – Vice President, External Relations and Internationalization 1 – Vice President, Student Services 1 – Vice President, Academic Affairs 1 – University Registrar 1 – Assistant University Registrar 1 – Dean, College of Education 1 – Director, Office of External Relations and Internationalization 1 – Director, Office of University Relations 1 – Head, International Marketing 1 – Liaison Officer, International Center 1 – Program Manager, International Program
Public HEI	3	3	1 – Director, Office of the International Relations 1 – OIC, Office for Internationalization 1 – OIC, Public and International Affairs Office
Private HEI-International Students	1	3	
Total	13	20	

Note: Interviews were conducted from April 16 to May 31, 2024

2. Context

2.1 Global overview of student mobility

Despite the shift in approaches and strategies for internationalization, there was a continued interest in international student mobility due to its numerous contributions. Student mobility was associated with enhanced cooperation and cultural appreciation among countries. For example, the European Commission (n.d.) found that students have a greater appreciation for the value of other cultures after studying abroad. Its contribution to the global economy, estimated at around USD 300 billion in 2016, cannot be overemphasized as well (Choudaha 2019).

The number of international students increased, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.4% from 2013 to 2022 (Table 3). In 2022, the top destination countries included developed economies like the USA, UK, Canada, France, and Australia, accounting for 60% of the total international students (as reported by countries participating in the Atlas Project). Historically, the USA was a top destination country. However, its share in the international students' market decreased (from 31% in 2013 to 20% in 2022).

Table 3. Number of international students in select countries

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
United States	819644	886052	974926	1043839	1078822	1094792	1095299	1075496	914095	948519
United Kingdom	488380	481050	493570	496690	501045	506480	496570	551495	601205	633910
Canada	*	237635	268659	263855	309530	370710	435415	503270	256455	552580
France	289274	295092	298902	309642	323933	343386	343400	358000	370052	364756
Australia	245531	247093	269752	292352	327606	371885	420501	463643	429382	363859
Russia	*	*	*	282921	296176	313089	334497	353331	395263	351127
Germany	265292	282201	301350	235858	251542	265484	282002	302157	319902	324729
China	328330	356499	377054	397635	442773	489200	492185	492185	*	292611
Japan	137756	135519	139185	152062	171122	188384	208901	228403	218783	201877
Italy	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	112010	125470
Total reported	2615937	3060121	3475304	3743146	4058229	4264579	4560099	4877699	4239159	4771215

Source: Institute of International Education-Project Atlas Database. Downloaded from <https://www.iie.org/research-initiatives/project-atlas/explore-global-data/>, October 3, 2024.

Note: *No reported data

Factors that attract students to these countries included the quality of instructions and educational products/services, good reputation of universities, good post-graduation employment prospects, affordability, welcoming atmosphere to international students, and appealing culture (Table 4). Meanwhile, students in these destination countries are enrolled in Engineering, Business and Management, and Computing.

Table 4: Considerations and main subjects of interest of students in the top 5 destination countries

Five most important considerations					
Countries the students are interested in	1	2	3	4	5
US	Has universities with high quality teaching	Is welcoming to international students	Has well-ranked universities	Appealing culture, lifestyle	Has a good reputation as a place to study
UK	Offers high quality teaching.	Has a good reputation the chosen subject area	Is welcoming to international students	Offers a specific course of interest	Is well-ranked
Canada	Is welcoming to international students	Has universities with high quality teaching	Possibility of work after graduation	Has an affordable cost of studying	Has an affordable cost of living
France	Is welcoming to international students	Has universities with high quality teaching	Has an affordable cost of living	Has an affordable cost of studying	Possibility of work after graduation
Australia	Is welcoming to international students	Has universities with high quality teaching	Appealing culture / lifestyle	Possibility of work after graduation	Has well-ranked universities
Main subjects of interest					
	1	2	3	4	
US	Engineering and Technology (19%)	Business and Management (18%)	Computing (14%)	Social Sciences (6%)	
UK	Business and Management (19%)	Engineering and Technology (12%)	Computing (9%)	Social Sciences (8%)	
Canada	Business and Management (18%)	Engineering and Technology (17%)	Computing (13%)	Medicine and Dentistry (5%)	
France	Business and Management (20%)	Engineering and Technology (15%)	Computing (9%)	Social Sciences (8%)	

Source: QS International Student Survey 2024

2.2 Comparison of internationalization indicators in selected ASEAN countries

2.2.1 Economic and education-related indicators

Among the ASEAN comparators, Singapore and Malaysia had the highest Global Competitiveness Index rankings in 2019, reflecting a robust economic performance and a conducive environment for education and business. Singapore was the only high-income economy in the group, while Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand were classified as upper-middle-income economies (Table 5). The Philippines and Vietnam were classified as lower-middle-income economies, highlighting potential challenges in resource allocation in pursuing development strategies.

Table 5: Selected economic and education-related indicators in ASEAN member states

Domain	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Classification by income level (2024-2025) ¹	Upper-middle-income economy	Upper-middle-income economy	Lower-middle-income economy	High-income economy	Upper-middle-income economy	Lower-middle-income economy
GDP constant (2023, USD million) ²	1,178,920	401,113	430,342	387,147	458,437	377,364
Government expenditure on education, total (2022, % of GDP) ³	2.4	3.5	3.6	2.4	2.6	2.9
Population (2023, million) ⁴	277.5	34.3	117.3	5.9	71.8	98.9
Access to Internet (% of population) ⁵ 2022	66	97	75	96	88	79
2023	69	98	-	94	90	78
Enrolment in tertiary education (2022) ⁶	9,320,129	1,119,650	4,164,809	198,545	2,004,258	2,900,323
School enrollment, tertiary (% gross) ⁷ 2021	41	41	34.9	97.1	49.7	38.9
2022	42.6	40.3	-	-	49.1	42.2
2023	-	-	-	-	48.8	-

Source: Authors' compilation based on various sources.

Notes:

[1] World Bank Data Help Desk. Accessed October 11, 2024, from <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>;

[2] World Bank (World Development Indicators). Accessed October 11, 2024 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD>;

[3] World Bank (World Development Indicators). Accessed October 2, 2024, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS>;

[4] World Bank (World Development Indicators). Accessed October 3, 2024 from <https://wdi.worldbank.org/table/WV.1>;

[5] World Bank (World Development Indicators). Accessed October 7, 2024, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>;

[6] UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). Accessed October 2, 2024 from <https://data.uis.unesco.org/>;

[7] "Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that officially corresponds to the level of education shown. Tertiary education, whether or not to an advanced research qualification, normally requires, as a minimum condition of admission, the successful completion of education at the secondary level." World Bank (n.d.). Accessed October 2, 2024 from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>.

With a demographic advantage, Indonesia reported the largest gross domestic product (GDP) at \$1.18 trillion in 2023 (constant prices), surpassing its ASEAN comparators. Despite having a similar advantage, the Philippines' GDP of \$430 billion (2023) was relatively lower. Singapore's smaller GDP of \$387 billion was notable given its high-income status, potentially underscoring its efficiency in generating wealth relative to its size.

The Philippines and Malaysia's expenditure on education were the highest in 2022 (3.6% and 3.5%, respectively). Meanwhile, Indonesia boasted the largest enrolment in tertiary education, with over 9.32 million students in 2022. However, Singapore achieved the highest gross enrolment ratio at 97.1% in 2021, potentially reflecting Singapore's efforts to improve its human capital through a lifelong learning framework. In contrast, the Philippines had the lowest at 34.9%.

Additionally, Malaysia and Singapore were leaders in providing internet access in 2022 (97% and 96% of the population have access, respectively). Thailand (88%) and Vietnam (79%) had higher internet penetration than the Philippines (75%).

2.2.2 Quality in higher education indicators

Indonesia and the Philippines had many HEIs (Table 6), providing greater access to tertiary education and enhanced overall reach and accessibility for international engagement and collaboration. However, the Philippines fell short in terms of globally ranked institutions. Based on the 2025 QS World University Rankings, Singapore led the ASEAN member states with two universities in the top 100. Malaysia had one university in the same tier, with 19 institutions within the top 1000. In contrast, the Philippines had its highest-ranked university at 336th, with only four universities in the top 1000. Notably, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025 showed a similar situation for Singapore and Malaysia, while the Philippines was the only country in the group without a university listed in the top 1000. These highlighted the significant gap in international recognition of the educational quality of HEIs within the region, crucial for attracting funding, partnerships, and international students and academics.

Table 6: Quality in higher education indicators, select ASEAN member states

Domain	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Number of HEIs (listed in the World Higher Education Database) ¹	1256	82	1330	9	145	175
2025 QS World University Rankings Number of Universities (Top 100) (Top 101-500) (Top 501-1000) ²	0 5 10	1 7 19	0 1 4	2 1 4	0 2 8	0 1 4
Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025 Number of Universities (Top 1000) ³	1 (top 801-1000)	12 (highest is in the top 201-250)	0 (highest is in the top 1001-1200)	2 (top 17 and 30)	3 (highest is in the top 601-800)	4 (highest is in the top 501-600)
2023 Global ranking (#) by English skills (score) ⁴	#79 Low Proficiency (473)	#25 High proficiency (568)	#20 High proficiency (578)	#2 Very high proficiency (631)	#101 Very low proficiency (416)	#58 Moderate proficiency (505)
Quality assurance (QA)		Leader in QA frameworks for the ASEAN platform, Nationals comprise a high proportion of the regional QA membership accreditation agencies. ⁵	On par in QA and accreditation across selected ASEAN, still falls behind Malaysia in QA of foreign institutions and TNE programs. ⁶	Leader in QA frameworks for the ASEAN platform, Nationals comprise a high proportion of the regional QA membership accreditation agencies. ⁵		
Research collaboration ⁶		High growth rate (> the world average) in research output Research impact is 6%>the global average	Research output, the lowest in the group Citation impact, the highest in the group (11% > the global average)	High growth rate, (> the world average) in research output The most productive country in the region	Second in research output	

Source: Authors' compilation based on various sources.

Notes:

[1] World Higher Education Database. (2024). Accessed October 22, 2024, from https://www.whed.net/results_institutions.php;

[2] Quacquarelli Symonds (QS). Accessed October 8, 2024 from <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings>;

[3] Times Higher Education (THE). Accessed October 10, 2024, from <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/latest/world-ranking>;

[4] Education First (EF). Accessed October 8, 2024 from <https://www.ef.com/wwen/epi/>;

[5] Lim, M. A. et al. (2023). The State of Higher Education in Southeast Asia;

[6] ASEAN comparator group includes Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. British Council. (2015). Opportunities and Challenges in the Internationalisation of the Philippine Higher Education Sector.

Singapore and Malaysia's prominence in global university rankings was underscored by their robust quality assurance (QA) frameworks, positioning them as leaders in the ASEAN region (Lim et al. 2023). Both countries also demonstrated high research productivity that was above the world average. Conversely, the Philippines had the lowest research output but had the highest citation impact among its ASEAN peers (British Council 2015).

The widespread use of English in the Philippines and its status as the language of instruction gave the Philippines a competitive edge in delivering transnational education in the ASEAN region (British Council 2015). This advantage remained, as noted in its rank in the 2023 English proficiency, placing 20th globally among 113 countries and second among the comparator group. Singapore ranked first in the group and second overall.

2.2.3 Degree of internationalization

Singapore emerged as a regional leader in higher education. It was considered an education hub in the region, exhibiting a high degree of internationalization through its proactive policies and robust international academic partnerships (Khalid et al. 2019). The country had developed comprehensive frameworks to foster cooperation with global institutions and enhance its educational offerings through an internationally designed curriculum. Its “look West” or “skewed West” higher education system orientation (i.e., “developing an international curriculum, expanding international student numbers, promoting student exchanges with recognized international partners and recruitment of international faculty, publishing in international journals, and strengthening international research collaborations”) had attracted international students, HEIs, and partnerships (Lim et al. 2023, p.34).

Although Malaysia’s internationalization level was not as advanced as Singapore’s, it made commendable strides in positioning itself as an educational hub in the region. It crafted the 2011 Internationalization Policy Book, which elaborated on the six core components of internationalization in higher education: student mobility, staff mobility, academic programs, research and development, governance and autonomy, and social integration and involving the community (Amzat et al. 2023). Its strategic plans, like the Way Forward for Private Higher Education Institutions (2020-2025), provided directions to enhancing the global competitiveness of its HEIs and improving the numbers of inbound international students.

Common trends also emerged among Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, which exhibited medium degrees of internationalization (Table 7). These included a heightened demand for quality education, shifting costs to students, increasing international faculty recruitment, emphasis on international research-oriented policies, and promoting transnational higher education (Lim et al. 2023).

In terms of allowing FHEIs’ operation, Indonesia, through the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Regulation No. 53/2018, allowed FHEIs to establish a physical campus in Indonesia conditional on partnerships with local institutions engaged in academia, research, and innovation. However, this regulation did not apply to FHEIs in Indonesia’s Special Economic Zone as stipulated in MOEC Regulation No. 10/202 (Azzahra and Zahra 2023). Meanwhile, the Philippines had demonstrated its commitment to promoting transnational higher education through the Republic Act No. 11448 (Transnational Higher Education (TNHE)). However, the law imposed several restrictions on FHEIs entry into the country. For instance, FHEIs could not operate independently, had to partner with local HEIs accredited by CHED, and were limited to up to 40% ownership². These conditions made the Philippines less attractive to FHEIs wishing to establish regional operations. Additionally, government support was limited, and most scholarships were offered by individual institutions (Atherton et al 2020).

² https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2019/ra_11448_2019.html

Table 7: Internationalization of select ASEAN members

Domain	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam
Degree of internationalization ¹	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Low
Strategy	<p>Higher Education Long-Term Strategy (HELTS) 2003–2010 declared that universities were expected to improve their competitiveness and quality to compete globally significantly.</p> <p>HELTS 2011–2020, focused on integrating internal and external quality assurance and developing a HEIs' database²</p>	<p>Guided by the strategic plan 'Way Forward for Private Higher Education Institutions (2020–2025)', Malaysia aims to establish itself as a premier international higher education hub, to host 250,000 international students by 2025.³</p>	<p>Executive Order No. 285 in 2000 emphasized the government's commitment to promoting the country as an educational hub in the Asia Pacific Region by encouraging international students into the Philippine education system⁴</p> <p>CHED Memorandum Order No. 55, Series of 2016, Established a policy framework for the internationalization of higher education, promoting international partnerships and student mobility.⁵</p>	<p>Aims to attract international students to Singapore, bring foreign campuses to this country, and set up world-class partnerships through "look West", or "skewed West" orientation of the higher education system⁶</p>	<p>Integrated higher education internationalization into its development plans since 1990.</p> <p>*Public and private universities are attempting to develop international teaching programs,¹</p> <p>*Recruiting more international students to boost academic reputation and improve the standing of its universities⁶</p>	<p>Internationalization is perceived as improving the quality of academic staff and research¹</p>
Status as an education hub		Has positioned itself as an educational hub for transnational developments ⁶		Considered an education hub ¹		
Trends ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -High demand from international students enrolling in HEIs -Emphasizing education quality -Lowering public expenditure by shifting costs to students -Recruitment of international faculty/researchers -Emphasizing international research-oriented policy -Promoting TNHE -Controlled/limited overseas branch campuses, but the number of branch campuses is increasing 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increasing public expenditure -Promoting international academic cooperation within and beyond SEA -Emphasizing cutting-edge research and development, and innovation -Emphasizing international profile and partnerships -Hosting overseas branch campuses and being the third country for TNHE -Promoting image as an educational hub 	The same with Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines (and Brunei)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Trying to improve education access, equity, and quality -Under-resourced human capital and financial support for international activities -Low/limited number of international faculty and staff, enrolment of international students -Promoting academic and student mobility through (inter)regional initiatives -Promoting research-oriented policy (though with limited success)
Foreign HEIs entry	<p>Granted authority for FHEIs to establish a physical campus in Indonesia as first stipulated in the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Regulation No. 53/2018.</p> <p>FHEIs must partner with a local HEI. This does not apply to FHEIs established in Indonesia's Special Economic Zone as stipulated in the MOEC Regulation No. 10/202.⁸</p>	100% Equity ownership -Foreign Equity allowed for College University/ University/ TVET Institutions ³	Foreign HEIs can set up an operation with a local partner, except for distance learning providers. They are limited to 40% ownership of the TNE venture. ⁷	Private Education Act 2009 provides for the regulation and accreditation of private education institutions to ensure the provision of quality education ⁹	<p>FHEIs that received the approval shall be operated in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and other special economic zones specified by the Council of Ministers. The renowned FHEIs operate in cooperation with public HEIs.</p> <p>2003 Private Institution of Higher Education Act: Private institutions of higher education may also benefit from government subsidies.¹⁰</p>	Regulations for foreign-funded schools were eased to allow more students to enroll. ¹¹ (includes easing entry requirements, allowing these institutions to establish campuses and partnerships more easily. It permits foreign schools to set their enrollment quotas, facilitating increased student intake) ¹²

Source: Authors' compilation based on various sources.

Notes:

[1] Khalid, J. et al. (2019). Regional Cooperation in Higher Education: Can It Lead ASEAN toward Harmonization?;

[2] Lambey, L., Jeini Usoh, E., Lambey, R., and Burgess, J. (2024). Challenges and Opportunities to Internationalize the Indonesian Higher Education Sector. <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/86650>;

[3] Malaysian Investment Development Authority. Accessed October 9, 2024 from <https://www.mida.gov.my/industries/services/education-services/>;

[4] Executive Order No. 285, s. 2000. (2000). Official Gazette. <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2000/09/04/executive-order-no-285-s-2000/>;

[5] CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 55 s. 2016. (2016). Commission on Higher Education. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CMO-55-s.-2016.pdf>;

[6] Lim, M. A. et al. (2023). The State of Higher Education in Southeast Asia;

[7] British Council. (2015). Opportunities and Challenges in the Internationalisation of the Philippine Higher Education Sector;

[8] Azzahra, N. and Zahra, N. (2023). Establishing Foreign Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia. Center for Indonesian Policy Studies. <https://www.cips-indonesia.org/post/establishing-foreign-higher-education-institutions-in-indonesia>;

[9] Singapore Statutes Online. Accessed October 11, 2024 from <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/act/pea2009>;

[10] Profiles Enhancing Education Reviews. Accessed October 11, 2024, from <https://education-profiles.org/eastern-and-south-eastern-asia/thailand/~non-state-actors-in-education>;

[11] Vietnam Briefing. Accessed October 10, 2024 from <https://www.vietnam-briefing.com/news/higher-education-vietnam.html/>;

[12] Accessed October 10, 2024, from <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Dau-tu/Nghi-dinh-86-2018-ND-CP-quy-dinh-ve-hop-tac-dau-tu-cua-nuoc-ngoai-trong-linh-vuc-giao-duc-337783.aspx> (translated in browser).

Thailand, in its bid to improve its academic reputation, had crafted policies for FHEs entry through the National Council for Peace and Order No. 29/2560 (Promotion of Education Provision by Renowned Foreign HEIs). Renowned foreign HEIs approved by the Committee on Promotion of Education Provision were allowed only in specific zones (e.g., Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) and other special economic zones specified by the Council of Ministers). Like Indonesia and the Philippines, the FHEIs' operation in Thailand required cooperation with public HEIs. Vietnam, on the other hand, had relaxed regulations for the establishment and operations of FHEIs and offered preferential treatment, including tax incentives to foreign educational enterprises³.

2.2.4 Factors attracting international students

Cognizant of the critical role of higher education in the region's socioeconomic, political, and cultural development agenda, ASEAN highlighted the importance of supporting students' mobility (Atherton et al. 2020). Among its member states, Malaysia and Singapore were the top host countries, which in 2022 accounted for 46% and 30% of the total inbound students in ASEAN member states (Table 8). The Philippines accounted only for around 8%. Some challenges were noted including the lack of openness to international students and academics in the Philippines, which manifested in the processes involving visa issuance and renewal and the challenges in setting up a practice of profession by foreign nationals (British Council 2015). Issues involving visas were not unique to the country, however. Lim et al. (2023), for example, documented that students' intra-regional mobility in ASEAN was characterized by slow growth due to language barriers and visa and administrative issues alongside incompatible degree systems, non-transferable credit system, and the HEIs' lack of competitiveness.

Table 8. Inbound international students in select ASEAN member states

	Total international student inflows						Average share, %
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Indonesia	7763	7677	*	*	*	*	7
Malaysia	100765		81953	89193	92519	100437	50
Philippines	12276	12154	11972	24356	24635	17337	11
Singapore	53204	51756	53030	54982	58269	66308	37
Thailand	*	*	*	25086	*	27113	12
Vietnam	4162	*	7250	8646	8370	7760	4
Total	179078	73016	155050	203226	184306	218955	

Source: UNESCO. Downloaded at <https://data.uis.unesco.org/> on October 1, 2024.

Philippine data: Authors' computation based on the data obtained from the CHED Office of Student Development and Services-International Student Affairs Division from February 7-14, 2024.

Note: *No reported data

The competitive landscape for attracting international students was influenced by several key factors, including language, historical contexts, cost of living, tuition fees, visa processing, and post-graduation employment opportunities, among others (Table 9). For instance, Malaysia appealed to international students, particularly those from Islamic backgrounds, with its bilingual education in Arabic and English (Lim et al. 2023). The Philippines also used English as the medium of instruction. In addition, Malaysia and Singapore benefitted from strong connections with global academics, enhancing their attractiveness as educational destinations (Lim et al. 2023).

³Grant Thornton Vietnam. (2020). Tax incentives for foreign investors in Vietnam. <https://www.grantthornton.com.vn/insights/tax/bloomberg/tax-incentives-for-foreign-investors-in-vietnam/>.

Regarding cost of living, Singapore was notably ranked second in global city rankings, reflecting its status as the most expensive city in the ASEAN region. In contrast, the other countries in the comparator group ranked significantly lower, between 129 and 200. Moreover, the estimated monthly expense (excluding rent) for a single person in Singapore was a staggering PhP65000, approximately double that of the capital cities of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand (within a comparable range of around PhP30000 to PhP40000).

Only Malaysia and Singapore had dedicated agencies managing international student visas. This streamlined approach mitigated concerns related to visa renewals by linking visa duration to the length of study. Visa information was also centralized, making it accessible compared to other ASEAN member states where relevant information was dispersed across HEIs and government websites (Atherton et al. 2020).

Post-graduation employment opportunities were notably better in Malaysia and Singapore, where clear avenues for work permits existed, making it easier for international graduates to transition into the labor market. Conversely, the Philippines presented legislative and regulatory hurdles in employing foreign professionals, significantly impacting its competitiveness in attracting and/or retaining overseas talent.

Table 9: Factors that attract international students in select ASEAN member states

Domain	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Viet Nam
Language		Attractive, especially to students from the Islamic world, because of the country's Islamic background and because teaching was conducted in both Arabic and English (Ho, 2014; Welch, 2012). ¹ Post-colonial linkage ¹ Western style Education ²	English as a second language Home of the world's "budget" English teacher Relatively low tuition fees, low cost of living, and (for some overseas markets) good geographical location. ³	Post-colonial linkage encourages academics in Singapore and Malaysia to maintain a strong connection with UK academic communities while establishing and strengthening links with academics in other countries such as the USA, Australia, and Japan ¹		
Cost of living, City ranking ⁴	#157 (Jakarta)	#200 (Kuala Lumpur) #214 (Johor Bahru)	#131 (Manila)	#2 (Singapore)	#129 (Bangkok)	#172 (Hanoi) #178 (Ho Chi Minh City)
Single person estimated monthly cost (without rent) ⁵	₹30,384.0 (8,277,547.7Rp) (Jakarta)	₹34,553.3 (2,586.9RM) (Kuala Lumpur)	₹38,313.4 (Manila)	₹65,463.8 (1,492.9S\$) (Singapore)	₹39,349.1 (22,897.1฿) (Bangkok)	₹28,391.7 (12,308,067) (Hanoi)
Average annual tuition fee in national universities ⁶	USD3,200 (Universitas Gadjah Mada)	USD9,890-21,016 (Universiti Malaya, etc., except foreign branch campuses)	USD79-1,140 (University of the Philippines)	USD18,588-29,874 (National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University)	USD3,900 (Chulalongkorn University)	USD2,500 (Vietnam National University, Hanoi)
Ease of obtaining visa ⁷	1 year with potential for renewal	The average is 1 year, which varies depending on the study for certain institutions	59 days, renewable each year	Varies according to the length of study	Initial 90 days + additional 1 year	3mos to 1 year
Visa Conditions	Acceptance letter from a university	Letter from licensed institution. Post arrival: health clearance Personal bond.	Appearance in the consular office, submitting consular requirements	The security deposit for certain nationalities ranges from SGD\$1500-5000.	Letter of acceptance	Pre-approval letter
Post-graduation employment opportunities		Non-citizens need to secure a job offer from a Malaysian employer responsible for obtaining a work permit on behalf of the employee and advising on the required documents. The 'Employment Pass' is valid for at least two years and a maximum of five. The Residence Pass-Talent (RP-T) allows skilled expatriates to work and live in Malaysia for up to 10	Foreign professionals can only practice if they hold a special temporary permit or a certificate of registration/license issued by the Philippine Regulatory Commission. In case the employment involves the practice of profession Needs Authority to	Fairly liberal immigration requirements make it easier to attract foreign talent to work after graduating ² The Employment Pass allows foreign professionals, managers, and executives to work in Singapore. Candidates need to earn at least \$5,000 a month. Employers must also	Has a favorable environment for post-study employment and preferential treatment for visiting academics and for those moving to Thailand to take up employment at a local university ³	

Domain	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Viet Nam
		years. ⁸	Employ Alien from the Department of Justice if the employment is in a nationalized or partially nationalized industry. (DOLE Department Order No. 146-15, August 20, 2015)	demonstrate that they have fairly considered all jobseekers. ⁹		

Source: Authors' compilation based on various sources.

Notes:

[1] Lim, M. A. et al. (2023). The State of Higher Education in Southeast Asia;

[2] UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific. (2013). The International mobility of students in Asia and the Pacific;

[3] British Council. (2015). Opportunities and Challenges in the Internationalisation of the Philippine Higher Education Sector;

[4] based on Mercer's Cost of Living City Ranking 2024. Accessed October 10, 2024, from <https://www.mercer.com/en-ph/insights/total-rewards/talent-mobility-insights/cost-of-living/>;

[5] Numbeo. Accessed October 11, 2024, from <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/>;

[6] The Head Foundation. (2021). Higher Education in Southeast Asia and Beyond (HESB). https://headfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/HESB-10_2021.pdf;

[7] Atherton, G. et al. (2020). Study On Enhancing Intra-ASEAN University Student Mobility;

[8] Education Malaysia Global Services. Accessed October 9, 2024 from <https://educationmalaysia.gov.my/fag/>;

[9] Ministry of Manpower. Accessed October 11, 2024 from <https://www.mom.gov.sg/passes-and-permits/employment-pass>.

3. Input to the Philippine higher education internationalization

3.1 Laws and policies

An earlier policy related to cross-border internationalization was Executive Order (EO) No. 285 in 2000, which provided guidelines governing the entry and stay of international students in the country. The EO recognized international students' growing interest in studying and earning degrees from the country's educational institutions. However, it underscored the importance of the balance between attracting international students and ensuring national security by enforcing immigration laws and visa issuance policies (EO No. 285, 2000). The EO stipulated that 1) only schools with programs accredited by the Federation of Accrediting Agencies of the Philippines (FAAP)⁴ or with the equivalent accreditation of CHED and the Bureau of Immigration shall admit international students and 2) CHED shall prepare/regularly update the list of eligible schools.

In 2017, the Inter-Agency Committee on Foreign Students Joint Memorandum Order No. 1, series of 2017 provided more detailed rules and procedures for accepting international students, issuing visas, and facilitating HEI-related processes (e.g., transferring to other HEIs, shifting to other degree programs). Related to visa, the memorandum provided the rules on applying for a student visa (9f) while foreign nationals are still abroad, for temporary visitors' visa (9a) with the intention to convert to 9f, and for 9a to 9f conversion when foreign nationals are already in the country.

CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 55 series of 2016 provided context, perspectives, and guidelines encouraging the internationalization of Philippine higher education. The CMO highlighted the importance of connecting and cooperating with the ASEAN community by advancing the development of Filipinos as responsible members of international communities. It articulated the concept of internationalization as the "expansion of learning within and beyond national borders and centers of scholarly studies". It identified two interconnected pillars: 1) Home-based internationalization or within national borders that integrates

⁴ Established in 1977, the FAAP, is an umbrella organization of the three accrediting agencies: (ACSU-AAI, PACUCOA, and PAASCU). It is authorized by CHED and the Department of Education to review, approve, and certify the accrediting decisions made by the accrediting agencies to grant progressive deregulation and other benefits (<https://paascu.org.ph/index.php/about-2/partner-organizations-and-affiliations/>).

international content in curriculum, processes, and activities (e.g., partnerships with FHEIs, providing international content in the curriculum, holding intercultural campus events) and 2) Cross-border internationalization that involves the cross-border movement of people and collaboration in programs and institutions (e.g., mobility in student/faculty/researcher, program, and institution). Policies, standards, and guidelines for transnational education programs are further discussed in CMO 62, series of 2016⁵.

In 2019, the enactment of Republic Act No. 11448 (Transnational Higher Education (TNHE) Act) actively welcomed borderless learning and teaching into the country. Recognizing the importance of Philippine higher education modernization, the law aimed to foster transnational education programs, build collaborations with foreign institutions to develop the Philippine higher education sector's capacity, and strengthen global connections. Thus, various TNHE programs were identified⁶. Meanwhile, foreign HEIs may operate in the Philippines through any mode if they are recognized and accredited by their home country, have met or exceeded the standards of Philippine HEIs set out by CHED, and have the capabilities and resources to provide education and support services to students⁷. Related to the staffing of these local branches, the law stipulated that foreign citizens may constitute up to 80% of the faculty and academic personnel and up to 40% of the administrative personnel and staff members. International students may not comprise more than one-third of enrollment. The Transnational Higher Education Division, operating under the CHED's International Affairs Staff, was responsible for formulating a comprehensive national strategy to encourage and facilitate the establishment of TNHE programs and institutions in the country. Relevant agencies such as LGUs, the SEC, BI, DOLE, and PRC were mandated to endorse TNHE-related processes.

The Philippine Higher Education Internationalization Roadmap 2023-2027 incorporated the abovementioned endeavors as it aimed to advance the Philippine higher education's international reputation, position the country as a global education hub, develop institutions as international members, produce graduates with 21st-century competencies and align CHED's policy with global standards. The roadmap focused on creating a knowledge-based society to drive innovation and economic growth. Moreover, it addressed challenges and opportunities in the context of ASEAN economic integration, the COVID-19 pandemic, and past internationalization efforts (Antena Project n.d.).

Related to laws and regulations on foreign nationals' practice of profession and participation in the labor market, the Philippine Constitution stipulated that the practice of all professions in the Philippines shall be limited to Filipino citizens. However, the Professional Regulation Commission identified several laws allowing their practice⁸.

3.2 Cross-border internationalization: Inbound students in data

⁵ Policies, Standards and Guidelines (PSGs) for Transnational Education (TNE) Programs. (2016). Commission on Higher Education. <https://ched.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/CMO-62-s.-2016.pdf>

⁶ 1) For providers, academic franchising, branch campus, international branch campus and TNHE offshore institution, and 2) for modes, articulation, joint degree, double degree, dual degree, international extension program, online blended, and distance learning, open distance learning, twinning arrangements, and validation.

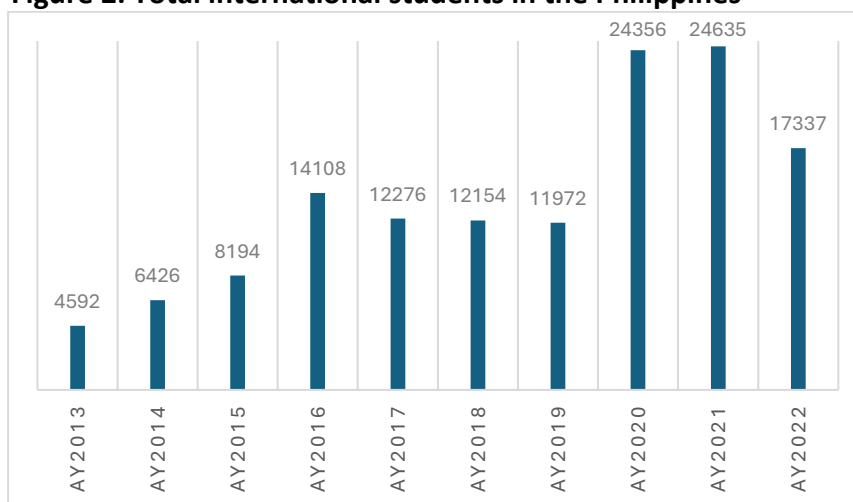
⁷ For quality assurance, various performance indicators are considered encompassing academic excellence, institutional resources, student and faculty diversity, alumni engagement, global connections, student support and services, and social responsibility among others.

⁸ 1) Section 7 (j), (l) of Republic Act No. 8981 or the "PRC Modernization Act of 2000"; 2) PRC Memorandum Order No. 3 (s. 2016) or the Revised Guidelines in Implementing Section 7 (j) (l), 3) Section of RA No. 891 and the Pertinent Provisions of the Professional Regulatory Laws, the General Agreement on Trade-in-Services, and Other International Agreements on the Practice of Foreign Professionals in the Philippines; Each Professional Regulatory Laws has provisions on reciprocity requirement (<https://www.prc.gov.ph/article/public-advisory-applications-foreign-nationals-intending-take-philippine-licensure>)

Related to cross-border internationalization, specifically inbound international students, the country had several advantages, including using English as the medium of instruction and relatively affordable education and living costs. Despite these, inbound international students in the country were historically lower than those in Malaysia and Singapore.

International student inflows in the country increased (Figure 2), with its pre-pandemic 6-year compound annual growth rate at 16% (from AY 2013 to AY 2019). Data also indicated that the international students during the height of pandemic (AY 2020-2021) were more than twice the 2019 inflows. However, the intake declined by 30% when lockdowns eased, and most travel restrictions were lifted (from AY 2021 to AY 2022).

Figure 2: Total international students in the Philippines



Source: Authors' computation based on the data obtained from the CHED Office of Student Development and Services-International Student Affairs Division on February 7-14, 2024.

Looking into the top 15 nationalities studying in the Philippines in AY 2022 (Table c). The sending countries used to be diversified, with students from South Korea, Nigeria, India, the USA, and China accounting for 19%, 11%, 7%, 7%, and 6% of the total inbound students in AY 2013. Among these nationals, the share of Indian students increased to 25% in AY 2015, which more than doubled in AY 2016 (59%) and peaked during the pandemic at 70% in AY 2021. The share of Chinese students to total inbound students increased to 10% in AY 2019 and has since increased (28% in AY 2022). The share of other nationals (e.g., South Korea, Nigeria, USA) that had a fair share in AY 2013 started to dwindle beginning in AY 2016.

While the inbound shares remained Indian-centric, the intake from India had substantially decreased coming from the pandemic years (Table 10), a decrease of 44% from AY 2021 to AY 2022). This was potentially due to India's National Medical Commission's advisory in early 2022 nullifying the validity of pre-medical courses obtained in the Philippines⁹, making Indian nationals with Philippine medical degrees ineligible for the screening test in India. Passing the test is required to practice a medical profession in India.

⁹ <https://www.outlookindia.com/international/why-over-10k-indian-medical-students-in-philippines-deserve-immediate-relief-from-nmc-news-189333>

Table 10. Top 15 nationalities of inbound international students in the Philippines

	AY2013	AY2014	AY2015	AY2016	AY2017	AY2018	AY2019	AY2020	AY2021	AY2022
Indian	326	780	2063	7331	7225	6038	5405	13227	17243	9673
Chinese	289	347	542	311	317	597	1186	5387	4599	4815
Nigerian	497	695	1046	1119	844	924	1229	1341	656	791
Thai	172	47	120	309	49	70	153	251	172	258
Nepalese	228	45	206	477	237	239	230	319	192	187
Vietnamese	115	283	137	171	43	84	175	198	48	154
American	312	182	190	269	151	269	267	316	140	148
Korean	858	1269	1201	893	479	774	589	488	154	126
Yemeni	9	59	84	192	429	419	259	298	124	113
Sudanese	166	99	250	338	365	312	225	222	106	96
Indonesian	82	287	269	159	95	259	218	259	163	96
Myanmarese	110	133	107	73	44	82	103	146	45	68
Papua New Guinean	32	165	380	331	117	244	140	127	55	53
Japanese	33	59	48	89	45	68	65	97	43	50
Somali	66	49	77	151	156	132	83	76	38	37
Total reported*	4592	6426	8194	14108	12276	12154	11972	24356	24635	17337

Source: Authors' computation based on the data obtained from the CHED Office of Student Development and Services-International Student Affairs Division on February 7-14, 2024.

Note: *Including other nationalities

Looking into the total outbound trends of countries considered top-sending countries in the Philippines (Table 11), it can be noted that there were countries with increasing total outbounds. However, the Philippine share of the total outbound had decreased. India's total outbound, for example, increased from 2017 to 2022 by 58%, although the Philippine share became smaller. Similar patterns were noted for Nigeria, the USA, Yemen, and Somalia. Meanwhile, the Philippine share of the total outbound of Thailand, Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea increased. These countries had decreasing total outbound, however.

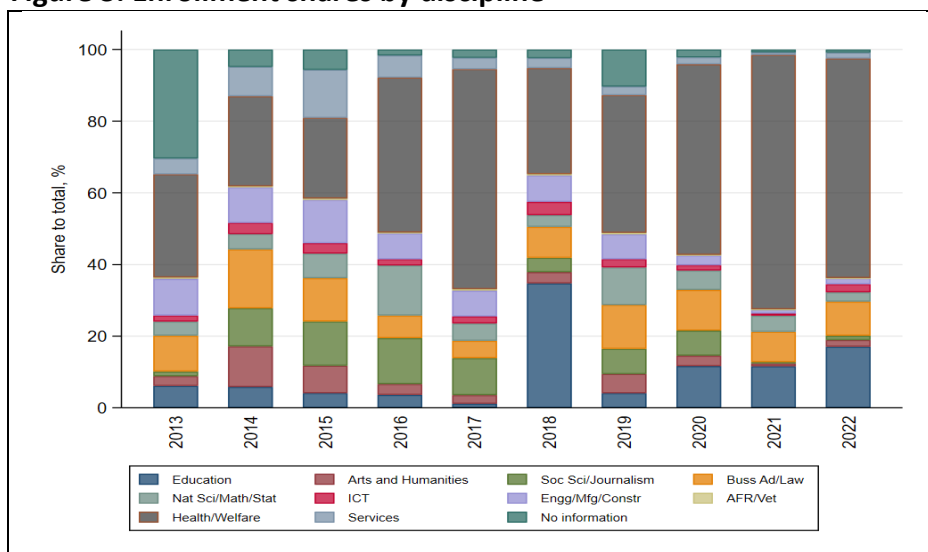
Table 11. Total outbound of countries considered top inbound in the Philippines

	Total outbound		Growth rate, %	Share of the Philippines to the total outbound, %	
	2017	2022		2017	2022
India	343089	541069	58	2.1	1.8
China	928376	1052284	13	0.0	0.5
Nigeria	86233	105650	23	1.0	0.7
Thailand	32579	18160	-44	0.2	1.4
Nepal	64356	36505	-43	0.4	0.5
Vietnam	94643	50950	-46	0.0	0.3
United States of America	86872	109026	26	0.2	0.1
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1116	789	-29	42.9	16.0
Yemen	25020	33114	32	1.7	0.3
Sudan	13602	13659	0	2.7	0.7
Indonesia	48551	33090	-32	0.2	0.3
Papua New Guinea	1478	228	-85	7.9	23.2
Japan	31771	24768	-22	0.1	0.2
Somalia	6195	14806	139	2.5	0.2

Source: UIS-UNESCO, <https://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3807>, downloaded October 7, 2024

Most international students were enrolled in health and wellness, accounting for a bigger share since 2013 (Figure 3). In AY 2022, around 61% of international students were enrolled in health and wellness, followed by education (17%), business administration, and law (10%).

Figure 3: Enrollment shares by discipline



Source: Authors' computation based on the data obtained from the CHED Office of Student Development and Services-International Student Affairs Division on February 7-14, 2024.

Note: Nat Sci (Natural Sciences); ICT (Information and Communications Technology); Soc Sci (Social Sciences); Engg (Engineering); Mfg (Manufacturing); Constr (Construction); Buss Ad (Business Administration); AFR (Agriculture, Forestry, and Resources); Vet (Veterinary)

By program level, the intake of international students from AY 2013 to AY 2022 taking up Ph.D. degrees in private HEIs increased while that of the bachelor's degree decreased (Table 12). In AY 2022, their Ph.D. intake was 13161 (around 76% of total inbound). SUCs had international students, although their intake was substantially smaller than private HEIs. In AY 2022, their Ph.D. intake was 330 (around 2% of total inbound).

Looking into the top 10 HEIs hosting inbound international students (based on the average share from AY 2018 to AY 2022), five HEIs were in NCR, and two were in Ilocos Region. Davao Region, Central Visayas, and Bicol Region each had one HEI in the top 10 (Table 13). All HEIs are in cities. Out of the nine private HEIs, four were autonomous. The lone SUC in the top 10 was level IV in 2007 and level III in 2016. Three HEIs in NCR and one in Ilocos Region had faculty members with graduate and undergraduate degrees higher than the non-top HEIs' average.

Table 12: International students by program level, %

	Academic year									
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Private										
Secondary ¹	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Short-Cycle Tertiary or Equivalent ²	0.1	1.1	0.7	0.1	0.0	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0
Bachelor Level Education or Equivalent	49.8	59.4	59.1	40.3	34.2	33.8	46.1	25.6	11.1	11.5
MA Level Equivalent	6.5	9.8	6.7	4.0	4.3	4.6	7.4	9.9	6.1	9.4
Ph.D. Level or Equivalent	12.5	4.4	9.6	32.7	47.1	15.4	31.4	61.4	81.1	76.0
Not Indicated	28.3	20.1	10.2	14.4	6.1	36.8	8.1	0.1	0.3	0.4
SUC										
Secondary ¹	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Short-Cycle Tertiary or Equivalent ²	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bachelor Level Education or Equivalent	0.9	1.0	7.4	4.9	3.1	2.4	1.4	1.0	0.2	0.1
MA Level Equivalent	0.4	1.3	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.6
Ph.D. Level or Equivalent	1.1	1.9	1.9	3.3	5.1	5.9	5.1	1.7	1.2	1.9
Not Indicated	0.1	0.0	3.7	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Authors' computation based on the data obtained from the CHED Office of Student Development and Services-International Student Affairs Division on February 7-14, 2024.

Notes: ¹ Lower Secondary Education, Upper Secondary Education, Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Education (e.g. Certificate); ² e.g. Diploma, Associate

Table 13. Top 10 HEIs (with inbound data) in the Philippines

HEI	Region	City	Type	Status	Ave IS enrollment share ¹	Ave faculty with BS ²	Ave faculty with MA ²	Ave faculty with Ph.D. ²	Ave num student ²	Num of COE ³	Num of COD ³	Num yr dereg ²	Num yr autonomous ³
Davao Medical School Foundation	Davao Region	City of Davao	Private	Regulated	0.30	489	56	5	4427	0	0	0	0
University of Perpetual Help System Dalta	NCR	City of Las Piñas	Private	Autonomous	0.15	59	97	36	6568	0	0	1	6
University of the Visayas-Gullas College of Medicine	Central Visayas	City of Mandaue	Private	Regulated	0.13	117	10	3	2383	0	0	0	0
Lyceum Northwestern University	Ilocos Region	City of Dagupan	Private	Autonomous	0.06	88	26	11	7696	0	0	14	4
AMA School of Medicine	NCR	City of Makati	Private	Regulated	0.06	23	8	0	306	0	0	0	0
Jose Rizal University	NCR	City of Mandaluyong	Private	Autonomous	0.05	84	139	52	6388	1	0	14	7
Bicol Christian College of Medicine	Bicol Region	City of Legazpi	Private	Regulated	0.04	33	9	0	1037	0	0	0	0
Adamson University	NCR	City of Manila	Private	Autonomous	0.03	164	282	59	11265	0	7	8	13
Our Lady of Fatima University-Valenzuela	NCR	City of Valenzuela	Private	Autonomous	0.03	95	298	37	13328	1	1	5	14
University of Northern Philippines	Ilocos Region	City of Vigan	SUC Main	Level IV in 2007, Level III in 2016	0.03	211	212	133	10387	0	1	NA	NA
Non-top 10 HEIs with inbound data					0.004	67	73	31	3805	0	1	1	3

Source: Authors' computation based on the data obtained from: ¹ Office of Student Development and Services-International Student Affairs Division on February 7-14, 2024. ^{2, 3} CHED through the EDCOM2 Secretariat.

Notes: NA (not applicable). IS (international students).

¹ Average from AY 2018-AY 2022. ² Average from AY 2018-AY 2021. ³ The validity period of COE and COD is from 2016 to 2018 (The validity period of the designated COEs/CODs for various disciplines is extended until the new guidelines are formulated per CHED Memorandum Order No. 3, series of 2019).

4. Process: Strategies for internationalization and factors that attract international students to the country

4.1 Strategies for internationalization

Forging Partnerships

A key component of internationalization strategies is the formation of robust partnerships that facilitate sharing and exchange.

HEI administrators shared they work closely with professionals and experts in other countries, underscoring the commitment of HEIs to uphold the professional quality expected of global standards.

“Our partners usually have professionals and experts. We seek their help and have them subject our examination items to validity and reliability to ensure that these are the common questions in the board exams in their home country. It usually happens in the last few months of the school year. So, it has become an annual thing before, but now we have only a few Indian students because most students who reached fourth year with us are already Filipinos. So only a few international students reached that level for now.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

Some administrators shared that partnerships often begin with small and trusted networks. By drawing from past connections and leveraging these relationships, institutions strengthen existing partnerships and forge new alliances, creating a foundation for future collaborations that are strategically beneficial and mutually enriching.

“We have partners from past collaborations, and the partnerships continued. We also get partnerships from attending conferences. But basically, we sustain previous collaborations.”

Public HEI Administrator (OIC, Public & International Affairs Office)

Within the institution, collaborations and partnerships can emerge from different levels, depending on who initiates them. The formalization involves signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) followed by a memorandum of agreement (MOA). These partnerships often focus on specific fields, aligning with the institution’s academic strengths.

“Collaborations or partnerships start in a department. But, they will not formalize it until it is approved by the BOR, which is the signing of the memorandum of understanding or agreement. Once approved by the BOR, we will start the activities. There are also cases of top-down initiative. Sometimes, the president receives the request and cascades it to the relevant department.”

Public HEI Administrator (Director, Office of the International Relations)

By thoroughly studying potential collaborations, HEIs ensure that their international efforts will allow them to expand while minimizing risks eventually. In addition, the proactive approach of regular follow-ups and doing an inventory of partnerships ensures that institutions focus on benchmarking and achieving tangible outcomes.

“We are not yet established in our internationalization, but we are working on it. And in terms of our partnerships, we always conduct follow-ups and inventory of our partners. That’s also one of our strategies. We look into how well we can leverage the offerings of other universities – especially those with MOA and MOUs with us. That’s also part of our initiatives, not just benchmarking but tangible outputs. Internationalization is not just about having international students on campus. It’s not just about faculty members going out of the country. It’s about internationalizing the program. It’s about being there in terms of reputation and a lot more.”

Public HEI Administrator (OIC, Office for Internationalization)

When there is uncertainty about the return on investment, engagement in exploratory meetings with a potential partner that offers to provide leads is necessary, especially given limited financial resources, highlighting the importance of careful evaluation before committing to such partnerships.

“We had some potential partnerships but did not push through because we are doubtful whether the leads will translate to enrollment. We don’t have much money, so we would like to ensure that the leads we pay will translate to enrollment, but that’s something the platform cannot provide us.”

Private HEI Administrator (Director, External Relations and Internationalization)

Some HEIs check donors’ credibility and ensure donors’ alignment with the HEI’s institutional values, particularly when funding is involved. For instance, careful investigation into the origins of funding is necessary to avoid any risks or associations that could harm the institution.

“We are very careful about choosing partners. Due diligence is key to our operations.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for External Relations and Internationalization)

Administrators also shared that they strive to find partners that align with their values and brand. They limit themselves to mutually beneficial partnerships.

“We aim for quality in partners because it’s essential to the alignment of our brand. Some are very aggressive. Most of them don’t have these limitations. For example, there is one school in China. They want the first two years of business school to be done in China, and then they’ll only spend two to three years here to complete the program. For example, business administration, plus one year to get an MBA. Based on research, we learned that most students are sent to a two-year program only. That is why they’re actively looking for schools outside to ensure they obtain a baccalaureate degree. We say no to it because that is not the kind of partnership we want. That is also not allowed by CHED.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

Informal interactions, such as networking and exploratory meetings, help institutions ensure that partnerships are strategically beneficial and mutually enriching.

Faculty members attending networking events and conferences often meet partners who introduce them to potential new collaborators, allowing them to expand the institution's network. They can connect with researchers abroad, leading to joint research initiatives. The HEI's internationalization office usually supports the process, which coordinates these initiatives.

"We receive letters of intent from foreign HEIs. Faculty members going to these networking events or paper presentation conferences will meet people and discussion will happen. But sometimes, we have partners who would introduce us to another university. That happens as well."

Public HEI Staff (Office for Internationalization)

"We have faculty members who present abroad. They go to these conferences and forums. They network with the other attendees there. And that's sort of how the collaboration starts. Some faculty would tell us, "Hey, I have met somebody from this university. They're interested in partnering with us." And, of course, as the office for internationalization, we do the bridging part and the exploratory meetings with potential foreign partners."

Public HEI Staff (Office for Internationalization)

MOAs formalize partnerships with educational agencies.

Partnerships with educational agencies, a general term for companies that recruit students in other countries, are formalized through MOAs. This guarantees that students arrive in cohorts, providing HEIs with a predictable number of enrollees and ensuring sufficient teaching loads for faculty members. The MOAs outline important operational details such as cohort sizes, study programs, costs, and payment arrangements.

"We do engage in MOA or contract with Chinese agencies. We have walk-ins, and they go through our regular process. We have a MOA with two Chinese agencies as our partners. The promise in 2019 was that these agencies would bring students in cohorts. We have not entered into MOAs or any contracts with other agencies because we want to finish the cohorts under these two to ensure that the faculty-student ration is maintained. So that's the only thing that differs between walk-in versus with contract."

Private HEI Administrator (Director, External Relations and Internationalization)

HEIs conduct due diligence by reviewing agencies' histories, their tenure in the business, and any affiliations with reputable universities, particularly prominent Philippine schools, to ensure reliable partnerships while maintaining flexibility for future renewals or terminations.

"Usually, agents approach us, and we develop a relationship with them after a while. We renew some, but we don't renew others. So, we try to check their previous histories, if they've been in the business for a while, and which other schools they might be working with. It is always a plus if they work with other big Philippine universities. But at the end of the day, it's a MOA. It's usually a limited agreement, right? We have the right to cancel at any time."

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Aligning with partner HEIs

Benchmarking against top schools ensures alignment with quality standards.

Alignment involves benchmarking academic programs to meet the educational and regulatory frameworks of other countries, ensuring that the skills, knowledge, and competencies gained by students are relevant.

“Our administrators have started their immersion in top universities around Asia and the US. They’ve started visiting schools with excellent track records hosting international students. We’re very specific. For example, because we want to grow our number of students in Thailand, we’re benchmarking against our new partner now in Thailand. So, we’re looking into ways to meet the global standards to attract students.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

Some HEI administrators shared that they look into the standards not only for programs but for other academic-related requirements as well, allowing them to see how much work on both fronts remains to be done.

“We’d usually look at the standards of schools in the US and Singapore, and we try to align our program offerings with their standards. At the same time, we need to align our requirements in terms of subject offering and all these other academic-related requirements. Our partners allow us to look into what they offer and share notes with them.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

“I can only cite my experience when benchmarking against Thailand and Singapore. We saw that we need to improve our library services. Their library is big and has amenities to accommodate the comfort of learners. It’s not just the curriculum, but also the services.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Student Services)

Alignment with the course requirements of partner institutions abroad facilitates smoother credit transfers and academic progression. It assures international students that their qualifications will be valid and valued in their home countries, making HEIs attractive choices for international students. Other than attracting international students, some HEIs are integrating the standards in other countries to ensure Filipino graduates are prepared for the global workforce requirements.

“We map our curriculum with a partner university, so we have exchange programs. We’re working on mapping the curriculum so that our graduates can find employment in other countries like Canada and Australia. Like in Australia, we lack a quality framework for some professionals, which takes time to develop. For example, a licensed pharmacist can be a program head in the Philippines but not in Australia. There is a difference.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Other than curriculum adjustments, student services in terms of quality and cost are improved to create an environment similar to top international universities.

“We just came from our strategic planning, and the school’s plan as an institution is to become an accessible school with global standards. We want to develop our local students to be subjected to global standards regarding education. We want to be accessible regarding price points and provide them with the curriculum and the entire experience that only global schools can offer. So, that means considerations of their accommodation and other services so they can experience a global university here with us.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

However, some HEIs are more mindful of local regulations or have a more local mindset.

Respondents from HEIs specializing in medical and health fields articulated that their programs are based on long-established standards. One administrator shared that the general sentiment among faculty members was that their programs are already holistic. Thus, there is no need for change. Administrators generally shared they do not innovate in their programs to accommodate requests for changes in curriculum and requirements, with one administrator emphasizing their mindset of primarily serving Filipinos.

“No. They need to adjust to us. It’s not us adjusting to them. We offer local and international students the same program, curriculum, and approach. We don’t tweak the program or special bridging – none of that kind.”

Public HEI Administrator (OIC, Office for Internationalization)

“Among the Indian students, they recently had an additional requirement like a 6-month internship. So, they want the universities to revise our curriculum to fit their country’s requirements. This issue has been presented to the PRC and the Association of Schools and Universities. We did not change our curriculum to suit the requirements of the Indian students. Because primarily, our curriculum is intended for Filipino students.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Academic Affairs)

Some respondents from an HEI with many international students enrolled in non-medical fields also shared similar views, with one administrator articulating they develop their curriculum based on CHED regulations.

“We offer what we have according to our expertise and the local market’s demand. So, the presence of international students does not affect our curriculum development. We have to comply with what has been released by CHED.”

Private HEI Administrator (Director, Office for University Relations)

When asked about plans to attract international students, one administrator shared that their strategy has always been to improve quality as they strive for world ranking. However, the premise of these initiatives is to provide better services to their students, Filipinos and foreigners alike.

“We keep improving our badges of quality. We improve our facilities, faculty, etc. I mentioned the world ranking, but we won’t hang our hat on international students. Ultimately, whatever student cohorts we have, our commitment is to the people here, regardless of whether they are domestic or international students. So, if you enroll in our school, we want to deliver good outcomes for you.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Pursuing quality educational products and services and human resources

Maintaining quality standards attracts partner HEIs and international students.

Several HEI administrators shared that they have accreditation from professional councils in Asia. Administrators of HEIs with large Chinese intakes shared that they are listed as accredited schools by the Chinese Ministry of Education, with one respondent attributing this to their position in the global ranking.

“Our school is accredited by the Chinese Ministry of Education. It was the Chinese who told us that. We belong to the QS rankings, and I guess it was the reason why the Chinese students or the Chinese, including their parents, decided to send their children here.”

Public HEI Administrator (Director, Office of the International Relations)

Several administrators also shared the importance of producing valued outcomes. One administrator noted that a valued outcome for board programs is demonstrated in the international students' performance in their home countries' board exams. Another administrator shared that a valued outcome entails producing successful and employable graduates.

"You mentioned that most of our international students come from Indonesia. I think the reason for that is the products of our school, the employability of our graduates when they return to their country. They are now working in well-known companies."

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Student Services)

Some HEIs leverage their quality educational products and services to cultivate strong relationships with international alumni and tap their networks for word-of-mouth promotions. These help them to attract new international students and build a positive reputation.

"We're counting on our alumni base to help. People see them as models. When they perform well, they are promoting the school. Because our students have good experiences, they'll put in a good word for you."

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Consistent with cross-border internationalization, faculty and student mobility initiatives are in place. However, staff mobility needs to be emphasized as well.

Administrators shared their schools encourage their faculty members to pursue advanced studies and training at international institutions, bringing back new skills and perspectives. However, one administrator highlighted that HEIs must consider the mobility of students, faculty, and support staff. The latter is often overlooked in most internationalization initiatives. The administrator further shared that by including staff in mobility programs, institutions can ensure that every aspect of their operations, from academics to support services, meets global standards.

"Often, we only talk of student and faculty mobility. Staff mobility should also be included in the conversation. We also have support staff in different departments and offices that we need to send for further training. So, when we do this, we also think of mobility for staff, not just students and faculty."

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for External Relations and Internationalization)

Some HEIs enforce retention and academic performance policies.

Deciding to let go of some international students who struggle to meet expectations can be difficult, but it aligns with the school's commitment to keep its academic reputation. One administrator noted that other HEIs lack such standards, often guaranteeing the graduation of international students.

"Building our academic reputation meant we had to let go of many international students. We had to accept that most of them could not meet our academic standards. So, they'd opt for schools that guarantee graduation or completion. And that is not aligned to how we want to project the school."

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

One administrator also noted that their target of getting international students is more conservative now, sharing that the large intake in previous years due to the marketing by educational agencies has resulted in many students failing to comply with the retention requirements.

“Our targeting of the international student is very realistic now. It was easier for us back then because the educational agency does most of the work. But the problem started when many failed. We’re now very conservative with our targeting because we know that our academic standards are in place, and we are not allowed to bend it to keep more international students.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

Providing bridging programs

Policies regarding English language requirements upon admission vary among institutions. Bridging programs, mostly in English proficiency, are offered by some HEIs.

Some administrators shared they do not require proof of English proficiency, but they require a passing score on the admission test, which is in English. Some shared they require English proficiency. However, accommodation is given to those who did not hurdle the cutoff through bridging programs. One administrator mentioned their plans to offer supplemental language interventions as they consider the Vietnam and Thailand markets. Meanwhile, one administrator shared they already have English bridging programs for Asian students.

“We don’t have screening. But I believe we have a bridging course. International students must undergo a short bridging course before enrolling in the undergraduate programs. They really cannot understand and speak English at that time. The most challenging ones are the Koreans. But Nigerians and Indians are good speakers but cannot write well.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Academic Affairs)

Others noted that English proficiency is needed to elevate the level of internationalization, with one administrator articulating that perhaps the requirement of English proficiency should be clearly stated in a CMO to remove any room for negotiations with partner agencies.

“We only have an entrance exam – the same entrance exam for all our local students. So, if they pass, they are admitted. However, regarding language level, we think we need to elevate our internationalization programs further. But we don’t have that kind of language proficiency or language requirements for now.”

Public HEI Administrator (OIC, Office for Internationalization)

“The CMO No. 55 only says if the university requires English, then the English proficiency requirement is necessary. Perhaps CHED should make this a policy. This becomes a point of negotiation with agencies, often arguing that CHED does not require proficiency.”

Private HEI Administrator (Director, External Relations and Internationalization)

Providing integral services

Help desks and liaison officers provide services to address academic and non-academic concerns.

A dedicated desk and coordinators to address any issues that international students may face contribute to a welcoming environment. One administrator shared that the Bureau of Immigration and CHED require the presence of a liaison desk. The HEIs process the student visa, ensuring the authenticity of documents.

“We have a Student Affairs Unit which serves the college. This has the international student coordinator, in charge of helping students with problems. They also develop activities outside the classroom setting. They’re developing material specific to Chinese students. So, everything from FAQs in Chinese, FAQs on Chinese students or for students in general. We have customer advocacy, an international student coordinator with the Student Affairs Office, and the China desk within the graduate school.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

“The Bureau of Immigration and CHED ordered us to put up a liaison desk. Students used to process their documents. Due to fake documents submitted, we were instructed to oversee the application to ensure that documents come from the Office of the University Registrar.”

Private HEI Staff (Office of the Vice President for External Relations and Internationalization)

The liaison desk ensures that student visas are renewed months before expiration. Some administrators find the one-year validity reasonable, given security and monitoring considerations.

“One year is ok because we also monitor, which coincides with the academic year. Part of our monitoring is that students do not miss any enrollments. One term of non-enrollment is grounds for visa cancellation. For the residency enrollment, the Bureau of Immigration limits us to 3 terms of enrollment.”

Private HEI Staff (Office of the Vice President for External Relations and Internationalization)

Integrating cultural components into activities further enriches the educational experience that resonates with international students.

“A big factor is the cultural component. When we sell our programs, we also integrate our cultural heritage. The promotion of culture is embedded within our program offerings. They get to see other places and learn different languages.”

Public HEI Administrator (OIC, Public and International Affairs Office)

Some HEIs help international students find comfortable and secure housing, ensuring they can focus on academic success. One administrator, however, shared the challenges of the differences in living standards, noting that most housing requires improvement to meet the needs and expectations of international students.

“Currently, one of the challenges is coping with the students’ standard of comfort, especially from America and Europe. We can accommodate six occupants in one room. But now, we have reduced it to four. But still, international students are coming, and they have to adjust to these four-occupant rooms.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Student Services)

4.2 Factors attracting International Students

The widespread use of English as the medium of instruction in Philippine HEIs is a strength, providing international students with a familiar language for learning.

English as the medium of instruction is a significant factor in attracting inbound international students, particularly from non-English speaking countries. HEI administrators consistently highlighted the advantage of acquiring strong English communication skills, which they believe enhances their employability and positions them for leadership roles upon returning to their home countries. A school administrator noted that Indonesian students' ability to speak English fluently after studying at their university has led to better career opportunities.

“There were a lot of Indonesian students who graduated here. So, I think our school was attractive to Indonesians, especially among Seventh-day Adventists. They speak English well after coming to our school.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Student Services)

One international student emphasized that the appeal of studying English in a country where it is widely spoken is for personal development and the opportunity to teach English in the future. Another international student appreciated that English is not only the language of instruction but also a language spoken by many Filipinos, facilitating smoother communication and integration into the local culture.

“When I was thinking about what place to choose, I know that English is a language in the Philippines, right? I’ve been here before and have already experienced how people communicate in English, connect with English, and view English. That’s why I decided to come to the Philippines.”

International Student (Russian)

The rich Philippine culture is another key attraction, offering international students a unique and diverse experience.

In addition to the appeal of the English language as the medium of instruction, the Philippine culture also plays a significant role in attracting international students. One student shared that, although they initially moved to the Philippines for work-related reasons, they decided to continue their studies in the country due to the education system's flexibility and the kind reception they received. They appreciated that the curriculum did not overly emphasize Filipino-specific cultural or historical subjects, which can sometimes pose challenges for international students. This adaptability in the education system, combined with the support from professors, encouraged them to stay for further studies.

“My brother and I enjoy the education system a lot because it’s very accommodating for us, especially because it doesn’t heavily rely too much on many cultural or historical subjects related to the Philippines, which some international students sometimes struggle with.”

International Student (Indian)

Cultural familiarity also plays a role in shaping students' decisions to study in the country. A student from Nigeria recounted how his elder brother, already studying in the Philippines, influenced his choice to study in the country. Initially unaware of the widespread use of English, the student quickly fell in love with the Philippines after experiencing the warm hospitality and being introduced to Filipino culture, particularly through a popular local TV series.

"My brother always praises the Philippines and his school. So, he convinced me to come to the Philippines to study. Maybe after college, I will pursue a graduate degree in another country. But I came to the Philippines, and I'm enjoying it so far. It's amazing because of the hospitality."

International Student (Nigerian)

Affordability is a significant advantage for the Philippines, offering access to quality education at a fraction of the cost in other Asian countries.

The affordability of education is a major driver in attracting international students to the country. Several HEI administrators have echoed this view, stating that many international students choose the country because it offers the same quality of education as other nations in the region at a lower cost. This difference in expenses made studying in the Philippines a financially strategic choice for some students, with one administrator highlighting the savings international students can enjoy by studying in the country.

"I have one student who is a Korean. He told me it was because he was a policeman in Korea. He told me that his tuition fee for one academic year in another country is his whole tuition fee for four years in the Philippines. That's the main consideration they had."

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Academic Affairs)

5. Product

5.1 Benefits of internationalization

Foreign partnerships enhance the capacity of HEIs to perform their functions in instruction and research.

Foreign partnerships help HEIs improve their brand and position in the international community. Aligning themselves with well-established institutions enhances their credibility and positions them as aspiring global universities committed to academic excellence.

"Benefit, I think it positions us as a global university because we have partners all around. And we try to partner with very established and strong brands so that it also somewhat reflects on the kind of institution that we aspire to become."

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

Through collaborations with international universities, HEIs offer dual degree programs, allowing students to elevate their academic credentials with recognized qualifications. Offering dual programs also helps HEIs benefit from critical resources they cannot provide students. One administrator shared that this is the track they took in one of their engineering programs, with students spending two years in the Philippines and another two years in the partner country where relevant facilities and equipment are available.

“We have a dual degree program on mechanical engineering major. We got into this program because we do not have the facilities to do mechatronics. We do not have that expertise. So, students stay in the Philippines for 2 years and stay in our partner country for 2 years. If they complete the requirements, they will be given the diploma in mechanical engineering by HEI and the foreign partner HEI .”

Private HEI Administrator (Director, Office for University Relations)

“There are schools that have a certain specialization. We want to expose our kids to molecular biology; some schools can provide us with better facilities and laboratories. We also offer things that their students are not exposed to. So those exchanges, whatever works best for the benefit of both parties, then we go for it.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

Another administrator shared that they form linkages with local and international partners. These partnerships enhance academic collaboration and allow students to have global exposure.

“We have several international partnerships in faculty exchange, curriculum sharing, and student exchange. So right now, we’re able to do student exchange.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Foreign partnerships provide Filipino students with foreign exposure through virtual platforms. One administrator shared that collaborative online international learning (COIL) is cost-effective since students no longer need to travel. Foreign partnerships also benefited faculty members as they engage with international counterparts and establish networks. Programs such as the Southeast Asia Teacher Exchange Program expand faculty exchange and shared learning opportunities. HEI respondents shared that these collaborations facilitate academic exchanges and resource-sharing and enhance access to global expertise and collaborative opportunities.

“The partnerships are different depending on their interests and strengths. Some can be facilitating research, access to data and expertise, or helping to source great faculty. It can be research, it can be in the teaching side, etc.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Collaborations also help some HEIs maintain and enhance their standing as a Center of Excellence.

“Being aware of what’s going on internationally. When you visit, for example, a certain university, you exchange ideas and concepts. We have a center of excellence, and we need to maintain it. We need to adapt and be flexible in procuring our gadgets.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Student Services)

The presence of international students in HEIs improves the schools' international standing.

Respondents shared that the number of international students matters in global rankings.

“So a lot of these, not just QS, but part of it is driven when you're trying to do rankings, internationalization is one of the measures, and internationalization is a combination of faculty and students. Student numbers for internationalization are kind of big, right?”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

The challenges that arise from accepting international students serve as opportunities for PHEIs to develop strategies that address issues such as cultural integration and support services.

“We should continue receiving international students, which would also be my advice to other universities. There might be some issues when accepting international students. But I guess these issues would also allow us to strategize more and be more responsive to the issues.”

Public HEI Administrator (Director, Office of the International Relations)

International students increase the revenue of HEIs and help the surrounding business communities.

There are significant revenues from international students, with one administrator sharing that they bring in revenues two to three times higher than those for local students. This additional revenue creates a cross-subsidy effect. Students benefit from improved resources and services, elevating the quality of education for the entire student body.

“If the HEIs' capacity space is higher, then it's like a cross-subsidy towards domestic students. So, you can treat your Filipino students even better because you have additional funding that you can use to make the experience of the whole cohort, including Filipinos, even better.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Administrators shared international students contribute to the financial sustainability of schools and positively contribute to the community. As international students seek accommodation, dining, and various services, they drive demand in the local economy, benefiting local businesses, such as restaurants and housing providers.

“We have income. International students pay upfront versus most locals paying on an installment basis, which is fine because that's how we are. We want to grow our market share because if you have a lot of international students, you don't only grow the school, you also grow the community. They have to find their dormitories. Even the shops around the university will grow.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

The presence of international students in HEIs enriches the campus with cultural diversity and enhances intercultural understanding.

The presence of international students in HEIs broadens Filipinos' exposure to other cultures. Some administrators articulated that having international students is a cheap form of mobility, providing Filipino students with insights from other cultures without traveling. By interacting with peers from different international backgrounds, Filipino students discover different languages, customs, and ways of life.

“One of the benefits for the university, aside from the income, is they bring to us their culture, language, and ways of life. We learn also from them.”

Public HEI Administrator (OIC, Public and International Affairs Office)

Cultural exchanges, such as presentations and shows, provide opportunities to observe and appreciate the traditions of other nations. Interactions in the classroom develop social adaptability and intercultural competence, helping students learn how to engage with people from various cultural backgrounds.

“One of the benefits is awareness and education among our students because international students come from different cultures. There is a greater opportunity for them to develop socially. Students gain wider perspectives of different cultures. The students learn different perspectives.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Student Services)

The presence of international students in HEIs provides an avenue to nurture an array of soft skills.

International students help position HEIs as global institutions by allowing Filipino students to collaborate with diverse peers, enhancing their learning experience and equipping them with the skills needed for the global workforce. This diversity in the classroom broadens perspectives and nurtures social growth as students interact and learn to adapt to various cultural norms.

“The benefits of having international students, I think, have always been positioning the school as a global university wherein you allow your students to mingle with students of different backgrounds and cultures. I think that’s most important because we try to prepare them for the global workforce. I think it’s essential that they learn to collaborate with different kinds of students. And that’s what we have been trying to instill in our students.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

However, language remains an obstacle to realizing the positive externalities from the presence of international students on the campus.

Some HEI respondents and international students reported encountering challenges related to language. Some students noted that, while English is the official medium, using Filipino sometimes prevails in classroom discussions and informal interactions with faculty outside of class. They also noted that English as a medium of instruction is a policy in place, although it is not always strictly enforced, particularly when teachers explain concepts. An HEI administrator also observed how the language barrier affected the students’ performance.

“The most common is what they say is the language barrier. They feel like it has an impact on their performance. Sometimes, the faculty would expound things or explain things in vernacular. So they have a challenge in communications.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

One student shared that although English is emphasized in his course, other international students struggle to understand important information for exams, often relying on peers or social media to clarify missed details.

“International students sometimes cannot catch some of the information they need to pass their exams and other tasks. They use Facebook to get some information from their classmates.”

International Student (Russian)

Additionally, the widespread use of Filipino leads to feelings of exclusion in social settings. Some students articulated that their classmates were generally accommodating when addressed in English, although they use Filipino in daily conversations.

“Sometimes I just wanted to talk to my classmates, but they all speak Tagalog, and I understand that. They have their choice to speak Tagalog, but sometimes it feels like I was excluded. Nevertheless, they can easily answer you in English when you come to them and start speaking English. But as far as I am concerned, there is an English-speaking policy, and sometimes it’s not followed, so that’s the concern.”

International Student (Russian)

5.2 Issues and challenges

Implementation

Most international students arrive in the country through educational agencies.

HEIs use various strategies to attract international students, including participation in educational fairs, networking, and partnerships with partner HEIs. However, partnerships with educational agencies mostly drive the turnout.

“Our approach to attracting international students has always been omni-channels. But our biggest contributor has always been our partnership with education agencies working for us. They are bringing in students to study with us. They arrange legal consultations and have contacts with the councils in their country.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

While educational agencies increase inbound students, one administrator noted that negotiations with them typically happen, which can cheapen the educational services HEIs provide.

“I don’t know if I’m using the word cheap here correctly, but it feels like it cheapens our intake of international students. Everything is negotiated, including the enrollment and requirements. We argue with agencies and tell agencies no. Requirements must be fulfilled. We don’t want the students to finish the program without being confident they did not undergo the rigor. We don’t want to gain the reputation that we grant degrees that easily. We don’t favor that.”

Private HEI Administrator (Director for External Relations and Internationalization)

Another administrator shared that Chinese students in their school typically use educational agencies, noting that these students are businesspeople motivated by future promotions in China’s labor market. The same administrator observed that Chinese students wanted to return immediately despite the HEI’s modular program, highlighting the challenges of negotiating with many people, including their partner educational agencies.

“In particular, I think more on the immigration side. Chinese students wanted to go back immediately. Our liaison officer who deals with immigration must deal with them with a lot of patience because our program is modular. We have to emphasize that they must stay here for at least two months to process their student visa, their immigration documents, and so forth. Students can also be demanding. They pressure the educational agencies. So, they negotiate with us.”

Private HEI Administrator (Director for External Relations and Internationalization)

Some administrators prefer that international students directly apply to them and not use educational agencies, with one noting the importance of providing seamless information to guide interested applicants.

“All things equal, we would rather not go through a recruiting firm. We’d rather the students apply directly. But for that to happen, students will only understand about us online. We must provide them a seamless experience related to the whole supply chain.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Using agencies also resulted in international students coming here on tourist visas, which has a quicker processing time. As provided by the Inter-Agency Committee on Foreign Students, Joint Memorandum Order No. 1, series of 2017, tourist visas can be converted into student visas once in the Philippines.

“Almost 90% are tourists; we will convert their visa when they arrive. However, when they come here, they already have the admission letters. Their credentials have been evaluated and accepted. Even if they are already admitted, the visa they will be granted in their country of origin is still a tourist visa. That is the procedure. They must process their student visa here in the Philippines, not in their country of origin.”

Private HEI Administrator (Registrar)

Some students and administrators shared that it would have been easier if students were granted a student visa before coming in. A Russian student shared that he was advised that getting a student visa in Russia is not possible and noted that it would be beneficial if students could go to their prescribed embassies to get a student visa, reducing their troubles in the Bureau of Immigration. One HEI administrator shared that Vietnamese educational agencies favor the plan, but the Bureau of Immigration insisted on international students getting student visas in the Philippines.

“Actually, we’re collaborating now with Vietnam agents. They want to process all their student visas in Vietnam so that when the students come here, they will no longer think about those things. But our Bureau of Immigration insists they should get it here.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

On the other hand, international students articulated that securing a visa in their home country is desirable but recognized the policy as a gatekeeping initiative.

“It’s easier just to have the student visa from Nigeria, so if you enter, all you need to do is follow up with immigration for the other necessary things. However, it also has advantages and disadvantages. What if you get a student visa, come to the Philippines, and decide you don’t want to go to study anymore.”

International Student (Nigerian)

One administrator who is well-versed in the provisions of the law shared that there are provisions for securing a student visa in the students’ home country but noted the burden of compliance and transaction costs.

“On the matter of visas, I understand that obtaining a student visa while you are still abroad is difficult, if not impossible. Students typically have to come here on a tourist visa and convert it. So again, there’s an element of risk involved with that as well. It is also not that helpful regarding where the consulates are located. The process is somewhat archaic and document-heavy, so if it were changed to online so that you can apply regardless of your location, that would be much more helpful.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Local regulations

Regulations present binding constraints to program and curriculum innovation.

Some respondents expressed an appreciation of some regulations. One administrator shared that compliance with the CMO on the ratio of PhD faculty members and advisees has limited their intake of international students, noting the difficulty in hiring faculty members with advanced degrees and prompting them to review their contracts with agents to ensure compliance. Another highlighted the importance of the CMO articulating internationalization as a national strategy, effectively guiding their otherwise scattered initiatives.

“We have AO No. 285 from various agencies on the acceptance and stay of international students, but there was no internationalization framework. Later, the law on transnational education and CHED CMOs on internationalization were released. We were doing our own thing as far as internationalization is concerned. We’re looking for external partners to work with us on research, but we were not aggressive. As a national strategy, we understood that internationalization can improve our programs. We need to benchmark our university regarding the program offerings, student services, and research. We have different engagements in academic or cultural exchange, research, projects, consortiums, etc. We are operating in a landscape that says internationalization is a national strategy because there is a CMO.”

Private HEI Administrator (Director, External Relations and Internationalization)

Despite this, most respondents articulated the need to be faithful to CHED’s CMOs and PSGs in program and curriculum development. One administrator expressed that CMOs and PSGs are binding constraints, highlighting the challenges of working with local and foreign partners’ rules.

“Well, if you’re thinking about us thinking about innovating, sure. As we’ve offered programs, we always work within the constraints of the rules of the student’s country of origin and our own country. So, we’re looking at two multiple sets of rules. The challenges are orders of magnitude higher. So, to your question about “Are any adjustments or improvements made?” Yeah sure. Especially in the context of how you get better outcomes for them. That said, again, we run into various constraints.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Thus, some respondents shared that they always take the more conservative approach to prevent problems in the middle of the program implementation. The respondent shared concerns about investing heavily in developing programs that may not be permitted by CHED in the end, highlighting constraints in creativity.

“We have our internal process. If it’s a new program, it’s not a revision, then the proponent will have to develop a proposal that will go through 2 stages. The first stage is to sell the concept at the school and university levels. There is back and forth, which takes time. There are CHED CMOs, and we would like to be very conservative. We don’t want to explore programs that will not be permitted. So, we are guided by those CMOs. If there are no CMOs, our hands are not tied. We have limitations. Most of our administrators are coming from that perspective. It’s not that they don’t want to create, but some constraints stifle creativity. We don’t want to violate the CMOs, so we keep the program as it is.”

Private HEI Administrator (Director for External Relations and Internationalization)

Even autonomous HEIs inform CHED of new programs. One respondent from an autonomous HEI shared they do so to ensure smooth program implementation. They can only advertise and market after the CHED's review. One administrator from another autonomous HEI shared that the lag in CHED's review presents the bigger issue in offering dual programs, emphasizing that a slow turnaround is unacceptable to foreign partners.

"Our biggest problem is for dual degree programs, which need to undergo CHED review. One year has passed, and we are still waiting. We had good negotiations with foreign partners. We already had the level of expertise at the helm. We cannot make the partners wait. Bureaucracy is what kills operations. Partners can say that the Philippines is not a good partner because it does not deliver, making a lot of empty promises. It gets me."

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for External Relations and Internationalization)

Administrators also articulated that they have difficulties aligning with partners in Australia and South Korea due to the existing CMOs on general education.

"We had pathways with the Australian universities, and we had a hard time aligning our programs because of our general education units. Most universities, like in Australia, they do not have those anymore. College students are expected to be specializing already in their fields."

Private HEI Administrator (Director, External Relations and Internationalization)

Thus, these respondents expressed the need for more dynamic and adaptive regulations, with one noting that the absence of such limits them to academic exchanges.

"Unless CHED opens up a bit or makes the PSG dynamic meet the partners' standards, we are limited to academic or cultural exchange. If we check the CMO, and there are deficiencies in units, we cannot grant the degree."

Private HEI Administrator (Director, External Relations and Internationalization)

Some national rules are not aligned with the pursuit of internationalization.

Respondents shared that having international faculty members is part of internationalization. However, the law regulating the practice of profession by foreigners is a barrier, with one administrator noting the need to relax requirements, especially when hiring experts or well-known professors at reputable schools.

"HEIs have challenges in hiring international faculty members due to visa and work requirements. To obtain the visa, HEIs need to provide that no Filipino is willing and able to teach. They also need to secure a special permit from the Professional Regulatory Commission. There must be some pathway to grant them a working visa. Are there spillover effects? Sure. World ranking and the Filipinos' exposure."

Private HEI Administrator (President)

When asked for the rationale of regulations on the practice of profession, the same administrator articulated that those were in place to protect Filipinos but noted that such concern may be outweighed by the positive spillovers to learning.

"The regulation is probably striking a balance so Filipinos will not be displaced in the labor market. I think it's trying to protect Filipino jobs. Such an issue can be outweighed when you're talking about really top-ranked faculty from some world-ranked university. Isn't that what we ultimately wanted from foreign investment in HEIs? It's another way of getting the same or similar outcomes when discussing constitutional change for higher education.

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Foreign nationals have limited post-graduate employment opportunities. One administrator articulated that students go to the USA, Canada, or Australia due to future employment and migration prospects. The administrator further articulated that this is not possible in the Philippines.

“Because first, the work visas here are very difficult to get even for somebody very qualified like a faculty member. And again if it’s a practice of profession, it’s very difficult to get approval. The better strategy would be to obtain the diploma here for better opportunities in their country of origin. This is the case of Indian medical students.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

The interviewed students validate the lack of employment opportunities.

“I’ve heard stories that my friends can’t find jobs. So, a lot of the time, we barely get job opportunities here in the Philippines because companies choose local citizens. But at the same time, the job opportunities here for international students are very limited. And often, it would be very hard to find jobs. I have a friend currently taking her master’s, and she said she’s applied to 15 companies, but she hasn’t gotten a single opportunity or even an interview.”

International Student (Indian)

External regulations

Intake is vulnerable to policy shifts in sending countries.

While medical schools have accreditation from the India Medical Council, one administrator noted that India recently announced that the medical degree obtained in the Philippines is no longer sufficient for India’s screening test eligibility. Some administrators attributed this policy shift to some HEIs that did not deliver the intended outcomes.

“The problem is the Indian government is discouraging their students from studying outside their country. Specifically, because they heard of some fly-by-night schools in the Philippines. But we’ve heard that some medical schools in Cebu and Davao produce many Indian students with medical degrees failing India’s screening test. All the other medical schools in the Philippines are affected by that.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

“We also led to our downfall. We will be perceived as a diploma mill if we don’t always deliver quality education and allow students to graduate without the correct formation. We are red-flagged.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Another administrator shared that the new policy requires Indian medical students to be able to practice their profession in the country from which they obtained their degrees. The administrator articulated that this is problematic since the foreigners’ medical practice in the Philippines is legally limited.

“There is a regulatory body in India which issued a regulation that if you studied medicine abroad and want to practice in India, you have to take a licensure exam with them. They cannot take the Indian licensure exam if they cannot practice medicine in the country where they studied. It’s a new rule. That’s a problem because, in the Philippines, a constitutional provision reserves Filipinos the right to practice a profession unless provided by law. And the practice of medicine by foreigners is highly restricted.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

One administrator articulated they can make changes in their curriculum to align with that of other countries but noted that a mutual recognition agreement between countries is key.

“International students are asking, for example, how can the College of Medicine program graduates be recognized in their country. That’s the issue. We know that mutual recognition is a government-to-government initiative. Maybe we can have some flexibility in the acquisition, for example, of programs, applications, and technology. But the acceptability of whatever changes we do in the curriculum depends on other countries.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for Student Services)

Another administrator highlighted the importance of mutual recognition, noting the decline in Philippine inbound medical students from Taiwan due to policy changes in partner countries.

“The Philippines lost Taiwanese students because we have policies and board exams. Taiwan changed its policies. Let’s say you graduated from the US. Instead of taking three steps to be a licensed doctor, you take two or even one or sometimes none because the curriculum is equal. But in the case of the Philippines, it’s different. The students know that if they go to a Philippine school, they will have to undergo several tests, licensure exams. Then, it depends on whether their government will accept these. That’s why Taiwanese students dwindled. I think they’re going to Poland, which is more accommodating of their requirements.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Funding and support

Internationalization initiatives can be costly. Thus, HEIs’ capacity for internationalization varies.

Some respondents articulated that capacitating their personnel or benchmarking requires funding, which, as one administrator shared, is an issue for them having only PhP300000 as budget. Others have more resources.

“Just to ensure that our teachers are aligned on international standards, we send them to study in the big schools to develop some competencies. I think the allotment of HR runs from 10 to 13 million a year, just for exposure of our faculty for continuous education in global universities.”

Private HEI Administrator (Head for International Marketing)

The need for support to achieve quality is also emphasized. Some shared that the quality of the HEI ecosystem needs to improve, noting that the HEIs’ internationalization initiatives vary, and some may need more support than others.

“There are advanced schools, but there are those in infancy. These need to be identified and classified. It’s also an active deployment of people to do on-the-spot checks. I’ve seen some HEIs that lack good facilities.”

Private HEI Administrator (Vice President for External Relations and Internationalization)

Noting that pursuing quality is an effective strategy to attract international students, one administrator highlighted the importance of efficient support distribution for quality-enhancing initiatives.

“In other countries, there’s some support on the research side, journal subscription, and funding grants to enhance faculty productivity. Ensuring that funding distribution is more equitable across public and private HEIs would also be helpful, assuming that those with better outcomes should be prioritized.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Government support for internationalization initiatives favors public HEIs.

Some respondents noted the government's focus on public HEIs' internationalization. One administrator observed that public schools have been sent to South Korea for benchmarking while private schools have to fund their benchmarking initiatives. Others further articulated that giving opportunities for private schools is also part of public-private complementarity.

“In terms of funding support. We understand that public HEIs have funds. But can they give some opportunity to private schools, especially those going the extra mile?”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Some respondents also raised concerns about SUCs accepting international students given free higher education in public HEIs, articulating that even if international students pay tuition fees, the tuition fees are heavily subsidized by taxpayer money. Crowding out Filipino students is also an issue.

“It's still the competition with public HEIs because that's free. And I think if you're a public state university or local university, you should not accept international students because you are using taxpayer money. And even if international students pay, they deprive a local student of that slot. We should be mindful of that.”

Private HEI Administrator (President)

Other challenges

Security issues and poor infrastructures can hamper efforts to attract/retain international students.

Respondents articulated the poor infrastructure and crime rates as issues, with one sharing their location as a big challenge due to frequent travel advisory. Another respondent shared that the stigma of a developing economy adds to the negative perception.

“The Philippines is a developing country. If you're a parent, you want the best for your kid, not just in education but also in the non-academic environment.”

Public HEI Administrator (OIC, Public and International Affairs Office)

6. Summary and ways forward

Mainly using qualitative data, this paper analyzes whether and how cross-border student mobility helps improve the quality of the Philippine tertiary education programs. The paper answers the following research questions: *Does cross-border student mobility contribute to improving the quality of tertiary education programs? Does it contribute to enhanced learning outcomes and program relevance?* To do this, the paper recognizes that the intake of international students is a product of cross-border and home-based internationalization initiatives that are mutually reinforcing to improve programs and learning outcomes. The intake of international students further improves home-based internationalization initiatives, thus creating a virtuous cycle of effective initiatives, relevant educational products/services, and increased foreign student intake.

Desk research and analysis of quantitative data indicate that:

- Singapore and Malaysia lead the ASEAN in internationalization.
 - Both have strong international partnerships facilitated by policies that attract foreign partner HEIs, students, and professionals.
 - Despite being the most expensive city in the region, Singapore, together with Malaysia, is a top destination for international students.
 - Both have dedicated agencies managing international student visas. Visa information is centralized and accessible compared to their ASEAN peers. Visa validity is linked to the length of the study.
 - Post-graduation employment opportunities are available. There are clear avenues for work permits, facilitating entry into their labor markets.
- The number of Philippine inbound students increased pre-pandemic, with a 6-year compound annual growth rate of 16% (from AY 2013 to AY 2019). However, the Philippine markets for international students were limited.
 - Most inbound students came from India and China. Outbound students from these countries increased, although the Philippine inbound decreased in AY 2022.
 - Inbound students from Thailand, Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea increased, although their outbound were decreasing.
 - Most international students are enrolled in health and wellness, which accounted for a bigger share since 2013 (61% are enrolled in health and wellness).
- The intake of Ph.D. international students increased while that of bachelor's programs decreased. SUCs have international students, although their intake is substantially smaller than that of private HEIs.
- Five of the top 10 destination HEIs were in NCR, two in Ilocos Region, and one in Davao Region, Central Visayas, and Bicol Region. All HEIs are in the cities. Out of the nine private HEIs, four were autonomous. The lone SUC in the top 10 was level IV in 2007 and level III in 2016.

Synthesis of interviews indicates that:

- HEIs' internationalization initiatives vary. Some HEIs benchmark against top schools and align their curricula with partners. Some have a more local mindset (i.e., Perception of offered programs being holistic and already based on long-established standards, curricula development mainly for the benefit of the Filipino students) or are more mindful of local regulations.
- Some CHED regulations are perceived as binding constraints to cross-border internationalization, including general education courses that do not match the curricula of some foreign HEI partners. CHED's review of new programs is needed even when HEIs are autonomous. The review can take time, discouraging foreign HEI partners, especially in implementing dual programs.
- Intake relies heavily on educational agencies and is largely a result of HEI-agency negotiations that can lead to compromises in requirements. There is no English proficiency requirement, necessitating some HEIs to adapt by offering English bridging programs.
- While there are clear guidelines for obtaining a student visa when students are still in their home countries, most inbound students arrive in the country with a tourist visa. This is especially the case for agency-facilitated entries.

- The intake of international students is vulnerable to policy shifts in major partner countries. The recent policy pronouncements in India do not align with the Philippine regulation in the practice of profession (i.e., Indian medical students should be able to take the board exam and practice their profession in the country where they obtained their degrees.).

Does cross-border student mobility contribute to improving the quality of tertiary education programs? Does it contribute to enhanced learning outcomes and program relevance? It does, to the extent that HEIs develop their curriculum, instructions, and delivery due to benchmarking against good schools abroad and partnerships that facilitate TNHE programs. The improvements in services, instruction, content, and delivery can attract international students, potentially resulting in further content and delivery development. This feedback channel is yet to materialize in the Philippines since the country has yet to command a strong presence in the international student market. Currently, its market for international students is limited and mostly facilitated by educational agencies, likely indicating that the country is not a choice educational destination but potentially a choice of convenience. There can be negotiations and concessions in requirements. The country's relatively relaxed requirement for English proficiency likely attracts students aiming to learn the language.

While the ultimate objective is to improve the higher education programs and learning outcomes for Filipino learners' benefits, an increasingly sustained market share of international students seeking the country for its high-quality instructions and relevant fields of interest is a validation that the country's internationalization efforts have paid off. Thus, programs and policies should be crafted to ensure a cohesive HEI ecosystem to upgrade the country to a choice educational destination. To do this, the following can be explored:

Create an HEI ecosystem responsive to local and international standards.

Categorize HEIs based on the level of their participation in internationalization.

HEIs can be categorized at levels zero, nascent, or mature. HEIs at zero level can be those without local accreditation and are thus not qualified to admit international students (per EO 285). Nascent HEIs have local accreditation but have yet to attract partners. Mature HEIs have established processes, regional accreditation, and partners/networks.

Provide support for internationalization based on these levels.

HEIs at zero level should secure local accreditation to ensure quality, including compliance with minimum standards and achieving excellence based on learning outcomes¹⁰. Consider making local accreditation mandatory. CHED can use its Higher Education Development Fund to support these HEIs and implement and monitor programs related to mandatory accreditation.

Nascent HEIs need to forge partnerships and invest in benchmarking. These HEIs should be prioritized in CHED-sponsored benchmarking activities. Since SUCs can include internationalization in their appropriations, providing benchmarking grants to nascent private HEIs should be prioritized.

¹⁰ <https://paascu.org.ph/index.php/standards/>

Craft mentoring programs for nascent HEIs

CHED can craft a mentoring program for nascent HEIs, with mature HEIs taking the lead to ensure learning spillovers. The program should provide incentives for mentor and mentee HEIs based on measurable outcomes.

Encourage nascent and mature HEIs to establish their niche; CHED to formulate policies and facilitate initiatives based on these niches.

The HEIs' ability to market themselves as strong institutions in specific study areas can facilitate market capture. Establishing a niche will allow HEIs to target curriculum and program development to become more cost-effective in benchmarking and partnerships. This can also help CHED become more cost-effective in facilitating government-sponsored internationalization initiatives and more agile and dynamic in formulating policies.

Meanwhile, SUCs can establish their niche in graduate programs. This will ease concerns related to international students benefitting from the free tuition law and mitigate issues of crowding out Filipinos in the higher education sector.

Provide seamless information on services integral to the intake of international students.

CHED can explore developing a portal that directs prospective students to Philippine HEIs qualified to accept international students. HEI-maintained pages should ensure a seamless user experience, providing information on the HEIs' niche, requirements for study, housing/accommodation, student visas, and other auxiliary information. Ensure that visa information is centralized and accessible. For monitoring purposes, a visa validity of one year is acceptable. Host HEIs should facilitate visa extension.

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