

THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE PERCEPTIONS ON AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATION (IEC): A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION (HEI) IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to find out the probable means of do an international educational collaboration from the management committee member of a private higher education institution in Malacca, Malaysia on addressing their fears and expectancies. A qualitative study with semi structured interviews was conducted with Director of Training & Education and Ketua Eksekutif of XX institution. The recorded transcript was coded, main ideas and themes were generated. The generated themes reliability test was inter-rated by an independent researcher. The interviews produced 65 themes which structured into five frameworks. The frameworks are the perceptions, the motives, the strategies, the barriers and the assumptions of the international education collaboration. This research finding was gathered from one part of Malaysia which is from Malacca and the number of sample was very small. The tendency of the findings to become bias to the individual's objectives is considerably high. The future research should focus on the cross studies with a reasonable sample size. This paper documents the insight of the collaboration. The existing framework of collaboration will be validated and improve some of the aspects in the collaboration. The outcomes of this study will significantly assist the future researcher on collaboration.

Keywords: *International educational collaboration, Higher education institution, Management committee perception, Qualitative research*

1. Introduction

The mission of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE) is to internationalise Malaysian higher education through effective marketing programmes and collaboration with overseas governments, agencies and educational institutions. This was due to the current global competitiveness among the universities whom facing a global talent war for faculty and increases of standards of quality to obtain accreditation (Cox, 2005). So, one of the strategies for university to enhance the quality of university education is through the collaboration (Gudo, Olel, & Oanda, 2011). This is an exploratory survey to understand the International Educational Collaboration (IEC) from two management committee members of a private school in Malacca, Malaysia whom currently acquiring for an international educational collaboration with some well-known university from England as part of their strategies and enterprise. A qualitative approach was employed to interview the samples.

2. Aims and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to find out the probable means of do an international educational collaboration from the management committee member of a private higher education institution in Malacca, Malaysia on addressing their fears and expectancies. This will address the critical research question: what is an international educational collaboration for the

management committee members of XX institution? The research questions for this study are the following:

- 1) How do the XX institution's management committee members perceive/define an international educational collaboration?
- 2) What would be the motives for the XX institution to create an international educational collaboration?
- 3) What are the strategies of the XX institution to create a successful international educational collaboration?
- 4) What could be the barrier to the XX institution in making a proper international educational collaboration?
- 5) What are the premises of the XX institution in making a proper international educational collaboration?

3. Existing Collaboration Framework

The strength of collaborations is depending on diverse factors. The main factors are the university's missions, university cultures, faculty interests and university resources (Harris & Williams, 2001). Collaboration is a procedure of participation through which people, groups, and systems work together to attain desired outcomes. Collaborations accomplish shared vision, achieve positive outcomes for the audiences they serve, and build an interdependent system to address topics and opportunities. Collaborations also involved the sharing of resources and responsibilities to jointly plan, implement and evaluate programs to achieve common goals (Jackson & Maddy). Members of the collaboration must be willing to share vision, mission, power, resources and goals. Throughout the collaboration, the faculty members exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge (Chaudhry, 2007) which leads to expansion of curriculums and faculty. Collaboration is enhance the quality of university's education (Gudo et al., 2011)

The collaboration is started by unifying the purpose of collaboration. At this stage both parties will create, maintain and revisit the mission and vision statements (Huffman, J. 2003). The vision represents holistic of the future and drafted at the present tense. Meanwhile, the mission exhibits the fundamental of the collaboration by stating the purpose for existence of collaboration. Then, get up with the goals and the aims of the collaboration. Usually it's set at high. Each party expecting a best results from the collaboration. A leader who is open minded, willing to share leadership and empower others will foster open and reliable communication for collaboration. The collaboration always focuses on increasing capacity, communication and efficiency while improving results.

The outcome of the collaboration can be achieved immediately or in the long term. It could be either directly or indirectly involve the parties involved in the collaboration. Some have only a little benefit meanwhile other may draw more benefits. Generally, a successful collaboration will results in improved delivery of programmes, opportunities for professional development (Butler, D. L., Lauscher, H. N., Jarvis-Selinger, S., & Beckingham, B. 2004), improved communication and enhanced information (Atwal, A., & Caldwell, K. 2002), increased use of programs and resources available in the community, elimination of duplication, increased availability of resources and improved public image.

Achieving a successful collaboration is not as everyone believed. As it takes two different parties with different agendas, to obtain win-win situation lots of barriers need to be solved before tie up into collaborations. These barriers are turf issues and turf mentality (Kruse, J.

2012)., lack of staff or time to collaborate (Abdal-Haqq, I. 1996), conflicts of organization focus (Vaugh, W. L., & Streib, G. 2006)., mistrust of collaborating organization (McGuire, M. 2006)., slowed decision making (Parkhe, A. (1991), limited resources or lack of willingness to sharing resources, external threats which leads to withdrawal and lack cooperation during crisis.

As a summary, existing frameworks in collaboration were discussed on the dimensions and the schemes of the collaborative programmes. This paper is intended to engender a more gist of the collaboration from the perspective of management.

4. Sample

This case study was studied at XX institution located in Malacca state of Malaysia. The XX institution is managed by seven management committee members. Three of them were on academic background and character of the team engaged in international education collaboration acquisition. They were the Director of Training & Education (DTE), the Director of Academic Affair (DAA), and the *Ketua Eksekutif* (KE) of XX institution. The invitations to participate this study were presented to all three of them. But two of them were accept the invitation to participate in this study. Director of Academic Affair was unable to take part due to the tide schedule.

5. Information Collection Methods

The semi structured interviews were directed at their office on separate occasions. *Ketua Eksekutif* was interviewed at the KE office and Director of Training & Education was interviewed at DTE Office. Consent to participate the interview form were emailed earlier and signed before the consultation sessions. The interviews took 30 to 60 minutes each session and the queries are mostly idle questions. These interviews were audio taped. Later, the details of the interviews were carefully transcript and coded in computer format. Cares was taken to ascertain the identity of the informants and the establishment was kept untraceable. Upon culmination of the last report, the recorded audio tape will be put down.

6. Data Analysing Methods

The taped interviews were transcribed word by word and special consideration paid to the non-word constructions. The gathered data were transcript using online free software such as InqScribe. Even its time consuming, a clean data was a transcript and labelled accordingly. Then, the prepared transcripts were analysed to identify the framework. An exploratory framework based on data was structured and tagged. Coding of the data was conveyed and the framework later was modified. Lastly, the scope of responses was categorised and the recurrent themes are distinguished. The generated themes tested for inter-rater reliability by an independent academician.

7. Discussion of findings

Five categories emerged from the psychoanalysis of the data; (1) the perception, (2) the motives, (3) the strategies, (4) the barriers, and (5) the assumptions. All major topics were discussed in these classes. In perceptions, the taxonomy and the benefits of collaboration were discussed. The needs and effect of collaboration were explained in the motives. The strategies are almost the effectiveness of collaboration. In barriers, the show stoppers were outlined. The overall expectancy of collaboration was drawn in the assumptions.

The perception

Both informants are believed that an international educational collaboration is an exchange of program, syllabus, faculty, expertise and student between two training and educational institutions for the purpose of benchmarking and commercial elements. According to Knight, J. (1997) the greatest amount of interest in the internationalization is the academic programmes which includes the student exchange programmes, faculty/staff mobilization programmes and internationalized curriculums.

Informant 2: “In terms of collaboration it can be courses and program, that means the exchange of courses and programs, or another aspect can be joint development of program. Or training courses all these things. Another aspect that is quite common that heavily happens today is of course the staff exchange, that means faculty and faculty exchange there. Another aspect is that student exchange.”

It is operated as a dual mechanism such as joint program development, franchising and twining program. Usually it's done by observing and adopting others, the means of doing businesses. The collaboration will work through several processes. One of it is the signing of a memo of agreement (MoA). Signing the MoA requires the board directors and legal department approval. Also, the background research on the collaborating parties and advice from outside parties such as consultants may count.

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The formal goal of the collaboration is to develop the capability. By helping each other, both creations are gaining benefit from the collaboration. Informants believe that the benefits are in term of transfer of technology, sharing knowledge and conducive learning environment which is similar to Li-Hua, (2007) findings that universities wish to obtain knowledge transfer through international collaboration projects. According to them, many establishments in Malaysia already have collaboration internationally including their foundation. Simply, they currently were conducting groundwork for future plans.

The motives

The informants concurrently agreed that the collaboration will assist their institution's vision and mission by push upward their institution as a world class foundation and become a solution provider. The collaboration will promote their capacities in research as easily as their facilities. With the focal ratio of technology growth, they recognized that the current diploma program is insufficient and looking for a joint degree plan. One of the informants believes the collaboration is needed in parliamentary procedure to promote the institutional level to a university status by providing a point plan. Knight, J. (1997) outline one of the initiative under the collaboration is the joint and double degree programmes.

Informant 1: “then now we have suddenly realized that we should offer degree program.”

Their aim of making collaboration is mainly for the reason of benchmarking their institution. By cooperating, they are capable to compare their capability and resource to other

establishments. The source believes it is a time for moving forward and creates a career enhancement centre for the scholars. Branding is their end product.

Informant 1: “we want them to award because we want their logo, their name, their brand is there”

The strategies

When come to the strength of their establishment making the collaboration successful one, both given different opinion. One said they have good facilities and enough expertise, another stressed they did not have any strength.

Informant 1: “they know we have the expertise.....only a few universities or colleges in the world, that has what, what you call, a full-fledged simulator type of training. XX is one of them”

Informant 2: “Basically we don't think we have any strengths..... Whatever we have is not so strong”

Since the collaboration brings in the technologies and information, the institution identified few steps in order to make a successful collaboration. One of it is the upgrading the trainer qualification from degree to at least master level initially then continues to a doctorate degree. The informants perceive that only good programme and good trainer able to create a successful collaboration. A good programme comes with full facilities. The current facilities need an upgrade. One of the informants concludes the success of the collaboration depends on the end product.

Informant 2: “To get a successful one we need to know what is the end state,”

The Barriers

When asked regarding the barriers could be faced by the institution to have successful collaboration, one said the budget and another one said the accreditation. Budget is due to conflict of interest between the board and the management. The accreditation is due to the local authority's guides and regulation.

Informant 1: “even though we want to have the collaboration with a very good renowned institution, but in the end, it also has to match with our budget..... Then secondly of course, is the acceptance, we have to see the accreditation”

Informant 2: “Correct or not, you have your own dream, organisation also has their own dream. There has to be a certain overlapping there, hmmm?..... . If management supports, looks in a different direction, then we would never go into that direction.....we just fulfil what is our operational need, that is the showstopper”

Simply, both informants believe above barriers can be overcome with strong academic enhancement and planning, reinforcement from the management, fee negotiation with the oppose party. They do believe scarification on the fee element also needed for it.

Informant 1: “we have to discuss that with our counterpart to make them bring the fee as low as possible. And to do that, we have to sacrifice something”

Nevertheless, they institution didn't hesitate to drop the intention of collaboration if one of these is happening: Jeopardising of current reputation, no student enrolment or no interest, and if no win-win situation.

Informant 2: “not be placed in a position where it can actually jeopardise our own program, our own reputation, and put us in a bigger situation where we actually have to abide where it is not form of a win-win situation”

The assumptions

Both informants are in belief that their trainers are in a comfortable zone currently. If the collaboration took place, they require going from their current comfort zone and have to improve their qualifications to the collaboration essential. One of the informants feels that they are not ready to make the collaboration with these situations. One the other side, one informant feels this degree plan will attract the student, while another informant feel there is no attraction for the people. But they considered that this collaboration will successful if there is a continuous lifelong commitment by the foundation. The faculty and staff professional development activities is one of the human resource development initiatives as outline by Knight, J. (1997)

Informant 1: “Because to overcome that so-called fear, you have to pull those people out of their comfort zone and that is the most difficult thing to do.”

Informant 2: “we actually ah, the present stage, we are not ready yet”

All 65 themes are generated regards to the international education collaboration. The generated themes were tested its reliability by independent academic inter-rater. The upshot of the reliability test was 80%. The current finding added value to the previous frameworks. Table 1 presents the improved dimension of Knight, J. (1997) framework of academic collaboration. The highlighted themes are added to the previous research framework.

Table 1: The improved dimension framework of academic collaboration

Knight, J. (1997) – Academic programmes	Current study (2014)
Student exchange programmes	Student exchange
Foreign language study	Transfer of technology and information
Internationalised curriculum	Exchange of program and syllabus
Area or Thematic studies	Observation and adoption of others practices
Work/ study abroad	Franchising
International Student	Continuous lifelong learning commitment
Teaching learning process	Academic enhancement and planning
Joint and double degree program	Twinning program
Cross culture training	Career enhancement training
Faculty/ staff mobility programmes	Faculty and Staff exchange
Visiting lecturers and scholars	Capacity development
Link between academic programmes and research, training and development assistance	Joint program development

8. Conclusions

The aim of this work is to determine the probable means of executing an international educational collaboration. In order to attain the purpose of this study, two members of a

private higher education institution in Malacca, Malaysia's management committee members were questioned on their fears and anticipations about the international education collaboration. The results of the interview support the existing hypotheses and the framework. At the same time, it also added some new themes into the existing framework. The education collaboration is defined as a process of exchanging and developing the program, syllabus, faculty, expertise, students, technology, information and facilities. This could be attained by watching over and adopting others best practises. The ultimate goal of the education collaboration is developing the capabilities, gaining experiences, benchmarking, branding and recognition, academic and career enhanced training, and provide continuous lifelong learning environment.

The survey also discovers that the cost for the collaboration, accreditation to conduct programs, top management supports, staff's willingness to upgrade their qualifications, the industry demands, sufficient expertise and the innovative facilities are ensured the collaboration move towards its goals to turn successful.

This subject area has its own restrictions. The first limitation of this work is that the sample size was much diminished. Only two informants were participated in this survey. Not much conclusion able to collect from these sources. The second restriction is that the survey was taken with only one institution in Malaysia. The results could be biased toward the aims of the foundation.

The future research shall focus to increase the scale of the study to bigger number of informants and gather the cross data from more 50% of the Malaysia higher education establishments.

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