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QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN PHILIPPINES: STAKEHOLDERS' VIEW

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Abstract

This study focused on the stakeholders' views on quality higher education in the University of Eastern Philippines. Specifically, it explored and analyzed the processes involved in the crafting of the institution's strategic plan in terms of its vision and mission statements; identified the quality assurance policies of the University; and, documented the performance of its graduates in terms of passing government licensure examinations.

A mixed form of research technique was used as the research design, utilizing 384 randomly selected respondents composed of students, faculty members, alumni, and community stakeholders. Also included as respondents were the Vice Presidents, College Deans, and 3 other University officials, thus, the total number of respondents was 400 individuals. The mean was used to determine and compare the responses of the various stakeholder groups.

Generally, the respondents were aware of the institution's strategic plan, but many of them found it difficult to memorize its mission statement. Consultations were made, though not with all stakeholders, during the crafting of the strategic plan. They also noted that policies and guidelines were established, implemented, and strictly adhered to by the administration in its daily operations. Over a six-year period (2009 – 2014), the institution and its graduates generally performed below the national mean in its performance in government licensure examinations, although it has consistently performed well in examinations for Nurses, Elementary and Secondary Teachers, Master Electricians, and Criminologists.

The institution therefore, has a well-crafted strategic plan, has established policies and guidelines for program implementation, and utilizes varied processes to ensure sustainability of educational programs. It is noted however, that performance of its graduates was generally lower than the national average.

Keywords: Higher Education; Quality Assurance; Stakeholders; Educational Program Sustainability.

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1. Introduction

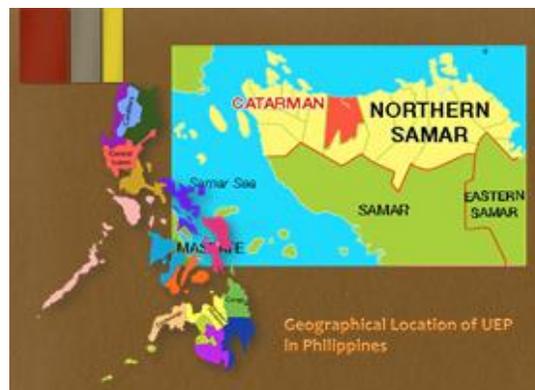
In today's world, the surge in the movement towards quality products and services has spurred top management of organizations to focus its energies and resources in improving quality, which more often than not, is intricately webbed with its productivity. Given the swiftness and scope of globalization, managers of organizations have become more "quality-conscious" and becoming active players in the highly competitive global marketplace.

It is a recognized fact that education is a fundamental element of human development, thus, almost every country in Asia has identified improving the quality of education as their higher national priority (*Adams, 1998*), but translating them into viable policies remains a major challenge. The precise meaning of quality education and the path to its improvement is often unexplained. Contextually, it may refer to inputs (number of teachers, amount of teacher training, number of textbooks), processes (amount of direct instructional time, extent of active learning), outputs (test scores, graduation rates), and outcomes (performance in subsequent employment).

Globalization's impact on education in developing countries becomes more pronounced, widening the knowledge gap brought about by the technological divide. Hence, in many higher education institutions (HEIs), a dualistic system may emerge where select universities participate in global education, while technologically handicapped schools remain isolated and stagnant (*Tullao, 2003*).

The University of Eastern Philippines, the first State University in the Visayas, is one of the comprehensive and research-oriented institutions focused on delivering "quality higher education" in its service area. Against this background, this study utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies was done to capture how stakeholders of the University view quality in the context of quality assurance as an important aspect of educational management.

2. Methodology



This investigation employed a fusion of qualitative and quantitative research designs; qualitative data being taken from the respondents' responses to open-ended questions, while secondary data on the performance of the institution's graduates in licensure examinations represented the quantitative analysis. Respondents, mainly from the Main Campus in Catarman, Northern Samar, were selected at random, and it included faculty members, students, community residents, alumni members, and University officials, who served as the key informants in this investigation.

A researcher-made questionnaire, adapted from the 2005 Master Survey Instrument of the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCCUP, Inc.), and that of *Hena (1999)*, was prepared and utilized as the main instrument to gather the desired data.

3. Results and Discussion

An analysis of the results indicate that the institution has clearly elucidated the direction it would follow to achieve its vision of a world-class university. It is also true to its avowed mission of developing students into effective and efficient accelerators of progress. *Kreitner and Kinicki (2008)* and several other authors were explicit in their claim that a strategic plan is very important as it represent a roadmap for the university in its journey towards fulfilling its mission.

The University’s stakeholders generally agreed that policies, guidelines, rules, and regulations governing faculty, students, and support services are well-established, widely disseminated, and strictly adhered to. This implies that the institution shows transparency in the development and implementation of its programs and projects. In a University, quality assurance policies increase student confidence and improve processes and efficiency, enabling them to compete better with others (*Ruiz and Sabio, 2012*). Thus, quality assurance must become an essential part of institutional management and planning, and as tertiary education changes, its systems and procedures must change or become irrelevant (*Lemaitre, 2009*).

Arcelo (2003) also stated that the most frequently used indicator of quality is the performance of graduates in licensure examinations in various disciplines and professions. From the data supplied by the Office of the Director for Instruction, UEP’s graduates generally fared well – with an “average performance” – over the last six years (2009 – 2014), albeit consistently excelling in the examinations for nurses, teachers, master electricians, and criminologists, while doing very poorly in the Fishery technologists’ examinations.

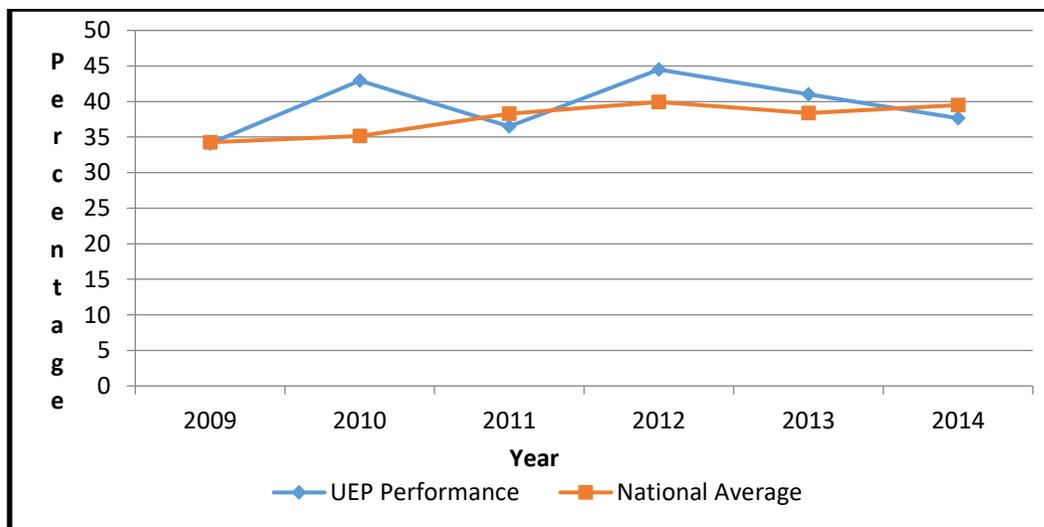


Figure 1: Average Performance of UEP Graduates in Licensure Examinations Compared with the National Average, 2009 – 2014

On the issue of what processes are involved to ensure the sustainability of educational programs, the respondents agreed the University has embraced program accreditation by the AACUP as a potent instrument in promoting and sustaining the quality of its educational programs. Accreditation has indeed become a fact of institutional life, with 47 of the University’s curricular programs accredited either as Level I, Level II, Level III, or as Candidate Status. Further, its management has established the Quality Assurance Unit and the University Instructional Materials Development and Production Board to regulate and support the production of books, modules, manuals, and/or monographs. It has also strengthened its faculty development program, giving more incentives to faculty researchers who publish their results in refereed journals, or present them in national or international symposia or fora.

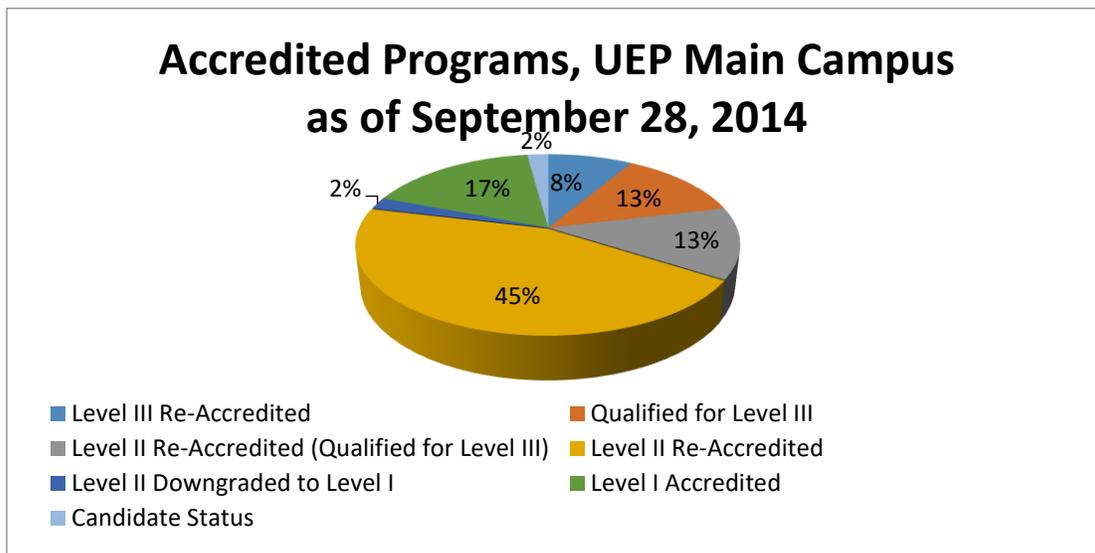


Figure 2: Status of Accreditation, 2014

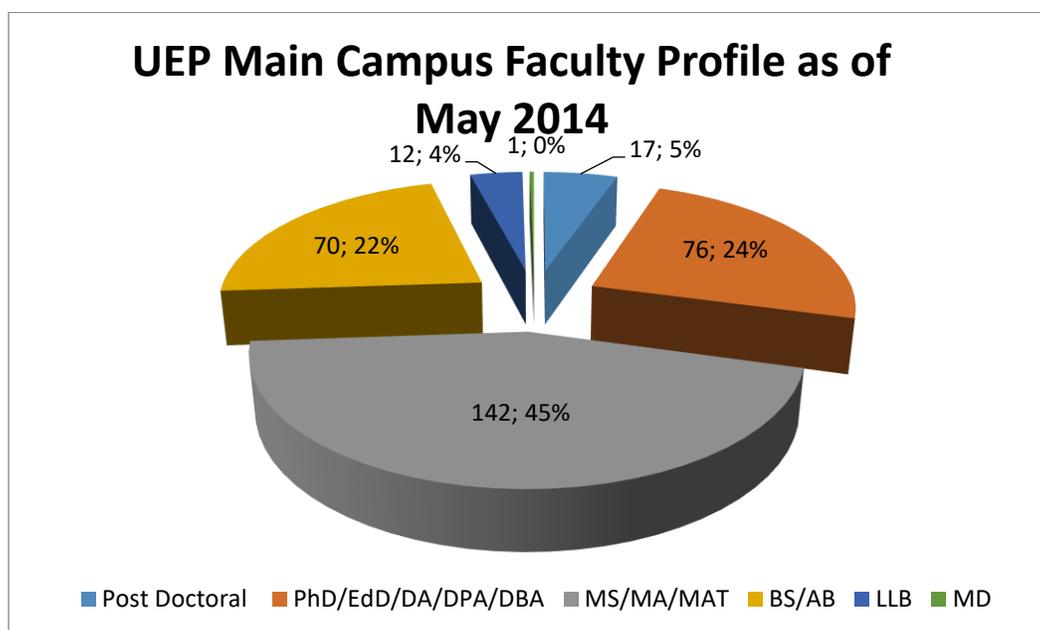


Figure 3: Faculty Profile, Main Campus, 2014

As higher education institutions in many parts of the world face rising costs, shrinking resources, and increasing demands for accountability, UEP has well established, functional units and offices tasked with the prudent and efficient utilization of its meager resources, and at the same time administers a viable scheme for fund generation not only from within the University, a corporate strategy commonly adopted by many SUCs as provided for in RA # 8292. *Arcelo (2003)* has elucidated the fact that differentiation in funding mechanisms is the origin of variations in institutional outcomes, with HEIs with better financing schemes having improved educational outcomes in terms of employment of graduates, and in pass ratio in professional board examinations and other indicators of quality.

As regards basic physical facilities and services to ensure quality education in the face of dwindling support from the national government, the respondents concurred the university provides for them, in spite of the factual necessity for classrooms, office furniture and fixtures, and “state-of-the-art” laboratory facilities and equipment.

HEIs therefore, like UEP, must reinvent themselves and provide novel educational and training services amidst increasing competition from corporate universities, academic brokers, and other new service providers (*Tullao, 2012*). Hence, achieving the ideal quality of education in the University is a shared responsibility of all stakeholders, holding onto a common vision, and unrelenting pursuit of its mission as stipulated in its strategic plan.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

UEP has a well-crafted and published strategic plan, with well-established and strictly implemented policies and guidelines with respect to its faculty members, students, and support services, and its graduates performing fairly well in licensure examinations over the last six years. Likewise, it also has established varied processes, systems, and procedures to ensure the sustainability of the quality of education, institutionalizing a fund generation scheme to augment the resources necessary to strengthen and sustain its programs, projects, and services.

That the strategic plan should however be widely publicized among all stakeholders, stricter adherence to policies and guidelines, strengthening of professional instructional programs, and periodic review of processes ensuring program sustainability are hereby recommended.

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