Proceedings
Cross-Cultural Education in AEC 2015:
Realizing Possibilities, Defining Foundations

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# CONTENTS

**DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION MODELS FOR AEC 2015** .................................................. 1

Enhancing Learner's Knowledge of Business Management through a Business Simulation Online Game ................................................................. 1
Traci Morachnick and Saranya Kantabutra

An Active Learning Strategy Model in Religious Education Using Religious Drama ................................................................. 13
Patrick Gerard A. Paulino, Ph.D.

Mathematics Performance of First Year Students of the Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology ................................................................. 23
Mae Amalia B. Pilarta

Instructional Competence of Faculty and Students’ Academic Performance ................................................................. 32
Pablo B. Bose, Jr., Ed.D., Nilda A. Bautista, Ph.D. and Mary Imelda B. Lunes, Ed.D.

The Economic Contribution of Abra State Institute of Sciences and Technology in the Development and Progress of the Province of Abra ................................................................. 43
Calixto L. Valera

Supporting Program for Disadvantaged Students to Increase the Successful Rate in Study in University ................................................................. 58
Damelina Basauli Tambunan

The Development of Effectuation-Based Entrepreneurship Learning Model to Increase the Ability of University Students in Running a Business ................................................................. 64
Tina Melinda, J.E. Sutanto and Sonata Christian

Integrated Student Support Services in a Seamless Academic Community in the Higher Education Institutions ................................................................. 74
Ramon T. De Leon, Ph.D.

Motivation in Language Learning: Voices from Thai EFL Learners ................................................................. 83
Warrapojn Panrod and Urarat Parnrod

Mantra Meditation: Spiritual Performance for the Community ................................................................. 90
Richard D. Madrilejos

Instructional Competence of Criminology Teachers in Region V: A Baseline Study ................................................................. 98
Ariel B. Barreda and Kuh V. Paterno
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CROSS-CULTURALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN AEC.</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying Formal Science to Social Science: Case of Accounting Study</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varong Pongsai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Culture Shock with Adaptation of Students at Ciputra University, Surabaya</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charly Hongdiyanto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Opinion Leadership and Sundanese Knowledge in Improving Intention to Use Sundanese Language in Bandung Higher School Students</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulganef Sutan Sati and M. Suhendar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-Culture Education in AEC 2015: University Readiness in the Face of Challenges and Opportunities</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bambang B. Sulistiyono and Diana Triwrdhani</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Barriers to International Cooperation on Innovation Training: The Case of I-SMEs Project in Vietnam</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dao Ngoc Tien and Vu Huyen Phuong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author Rights Awareness to Promote an Inter-university Open-access Repository for Theses and Memoires</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel Khalil, Ph.D., Joyce Draiby, M.A. and Nancy Abi Karam, LLM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADING-EDGE STRATEGIES AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO EDUCATIONAL QUALITY</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Strengths, Best Practices, and Challenges of Centers of Excellence in Veterinary Education for Instructional Quality in the Philippines</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Rezin C. Bahia, DVM, MS, Ph.D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Expectations towards Teaching and Learning Process for Entering into the AEC Era</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narat Wattanapanit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opinions to Higher Education Appraisal Criterions of Off-Campuses in Thai Upper Central Region of Thailand</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asst. Prof. Dr. Tawonatiwas Staporn and Kitchainukoon Patteraporn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of a Model of Integrated Quality Management Strategies Using Advanced Execution Premium Strategies and Comprehensive Quality Assurance System for Public Universities</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuan Tongkeo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictors of Performance in the Licensure Examination for Teachers of the Graduates of Higher Education Institutions in Abra</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dionisio A. Visco, Ed. D.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Self-Efficacy to Persistence of Technology Students in the Philippines</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mateo R. Borbon, Jr.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Entrepreneurship Learning in Cross-Cultural Educational Environment: The Dynamics and Critical Factors
Liliani and Michael Siek

Effects of Interactive Health Education on the Compliance of Mothers to Postpartum Care
Dr. Evelyn M. Del Mundo

Who Says We Are Not Human? The Art and Science of Forgiveness in Educational Leadership
Yosep Undung and Allan B. de Guzman

Perceptions of Entrepreneurship as a Career: Evidence from Selected Tertiary Schools Across Programs in the Philippines
Alice T. Valerio, Ph.D.

The Effectiveness of the English Plus Program of Bicol University
Ma. Celina Eladia G. Meneses, Ph.D. and Jocelyn I. Bartolata, Ed.D.

Development of Competency-Based Modules in Bartending; Instructional Strategies and Problems
Gina R. Dela Roca and Kuh V. Paterno

Experimental Study on the Effectiveness of Housekeeping Services Module
Salvacion C. Pesimo, Kuh V. Paterno and Nino R. Rebuya

Performance of Students in Food and Beverage Services: An Assessment
Jossie B. Romero, Emy S. Lasarte, Jocelyn P. Amata and Arnel B. Millesca

Improving Professional Education Learning Outcomes through L1 - Mother Tongue-Based Instruction
Shirley D. Frigillano, Sandra T. Examen and Joel Ferolino

Impact of Social Environment on Student Integration and First-Year Academic Performance: Case Study
Lionel Khalil, Ph.D. and Antoine Farhat, Ph.D.

Responding to the Challenges of the ASEAN Integration in 2015
Olivia Martinez Legaspi

CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE AEC BOUNDARIES

Developing Strategic KPIs for HEIs
Teay Shawyun

South East Asian Higher Education at the Cross Roads
Nirwan Idrus
Sampling Designs and Formulae in Business and Management Research
Eddie Seva See, Mary Ann Musni See and Eduardo Rodrigo Musni See .......................... 332

The De La Salle University Dasmarias K12 Undertakings and its Challenges to the Academic Community
Dr. Sonia M. Gementiza, Dr. Necitas F. Sayoto and Dr. Sonia M. Atienza .......................... 343

Appraisal and Barriers to Clinical Performance among Cavite State University BSN Level IV Students SY 2011-2012 in Affiliated Tertiary Hospitals

Dominican Education as Practiced in Aquinas University of Legazpi
Marytina Raquel R. Bonganay, MOS and Romina E. Villamor, MALit .......................... 364

EDUCATION AND AUTHENTIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT FOR AEC .......................... 373

Comparison of Learning Styles Between Engineering Students and Non-Engineering Students in UNITEN
Chua Yaw Long, Ker Pin Jern, Wong Jee Khai and Koh Yit Yan .......................... 377

Contributory Variables to Passing the Licensure Examination for Teachers Among Certificate in Teaching Students of the Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University-Open University System
Priscilla S. Abellera .......................... 380

Socio-cultural Variables and Ethnocentrism among Senior College Students: Implications to ASEAN 2015
Prof. Ma. Florecilla C. Cinches, Ph.D. and Prof. Ruth Love V. Russell, DM .......................... 390

Social Development and Operational Frameworks for Philippine Higher Educational Institutions Towards Poverty Reduction
Prof. Noel R. Rafer .......................... 400

The Development of Teachers in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Era
Krisda Tanchaisak and Narat Wattanapanit .......................... 416

There is a Fantastic Form of Relation between Things: Education in the Fetishism of the Commodities
Vincent L. Casil .......................... 422

“Bring Me On Time To My School” Implications of Public Utility Vehicle Drivers’ Behavior on Student-Commuters
Susan T. Mostajo .......................... 430

The Impact of Police Community Relations to Policy Formulation in DLSU-D
Alrien Francisco Dausan .......................... 442
Lived Experiences of On-Campus Working Students
Shirley D. Frigillano, Ely S. Ciasico and Linda M. Nulada

The Language of Mathematics: Will the Use of L1 Improve Mathematics Performance?
Josephine R. Macasieb, Jennifer D. Monje and Victoria R. Ramos

A Training Design for the Language Faculty: Viewpoints on Technology Integration
Charito G. Ong, Ph.D.

Mt. Isarog Literatures: A Showcase of Camarinense Cultural Diversity
Maria Aurora G. Caballero, Ed.D.

A Tracer Study of BSHRM Graduates of Partido State University-San Jose Campus:
As Basis for Curriculum Development
Joosie B. Romero, Sean A. Sierra, Mericia Mila A. Amador, Emy S. Lasarte and Arnel B. Millesca

Employability and Employability Profile of Tourism Management Graduates of PSU-San Jose Campus: As Basis for Curriculum Modification
Jocelyn Amata, Emy S. Lasarte, Cristy Naldoza, Sean A. Sierra and Arnel B. Millesca
Supporting Program for Disadvantage Students to Increase the Successful Rate in Study in University

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to find out the expected program to be conducted by university to encourage the confidence of the disadvantage students in Indonesia in order to increase the successful rate to finish their study in university. Disadvantage student in this research refers to the students from minority race, disability, lower socio-economic condition.

There are two groups of respondent in this research. The first group is 30 lecturers who teach in several universities and the second group is six students from two areas in Indonesia; east and west. The lecturers are interviewed to find out their perspective and idea on how to develop and increase the success rate of disadvantage students in university and the students are interviewed about their feeling of being in disadvantage conditions and their responds upon the condition. Collected data are analyzed by collecting the answer and listing out the program based on priority. The expected program is divided into two programs. The first program is to open access for disadvantage students to enter university and the second program is to increase the success rate of disadvantage students to finish their study in university.

Keywords: Disadvantage students, program, successful rate

Introduction

Education is generally perceived as a bridge to a better life in the future, which will improve the quality of life. Thus, access to education should be open to everyone without exception. The beneficial contributions of education have been analyzed along the years from various points of view: productivity growth, income growth of educated persons, decreasing social discrepancies, reducing disparities between the levels of development among countries (Livia & Laura, 2009). Unfortunately, access to higher education is very limited, particularly for people with disabilities in various fields such as economics (Asplund, Adbelkarim, & Skalli, 2008); gender differences; ethnic groups (Livia & Laura, 2009) and so on.

In Indonesia, compulsory education for all citizens is given to primary and secondary education for 9 years. Furthermore, higher education is an optional education for everyone; therefore the access depends on economic condition and intellectual ability to entrance university. Despite embracing the ideology of Pancasila in which humanity and social justice are core principles, taking care of disadvantaged students is not yet mainstream in Indonesian society nor or tertiary education. Respondents acknowledged that some universities were structurally
unprepared or unable to support the specific needs of disadvantaged students to ensure they can access tertiary education which will contribute to their quality of life. Many disadvantaged students are poor and include those who are from remote areas, are a part of a minority group, and/or have a mental or physical disability. Disadvantaged students find it difficult to enter university and are sometimes not supported to access tertiary studies. For instance, national selection to enter public universities in Indonesia is more likely to give indirect and direct benefits to rich students only. It can be seen from the announcement of admission and other related information is disseminated by mainstream media where the coverage limited in the urban area. Also the admission fee is quite expensive for some disadvantage students cannot afford to submit.

Some scholarships do exist, offer by central and local government to fund the education of disadvantaged students. However most of these are linked to academic performance not poor socio-economic conditions. Without scholarships on the basis of socio-economic disadvantage there can be self-perpetuating cycle where poor students have to support themselves and work while they study so are unable to achieve the grades required to access scholarships and stop working. For those that are on scholarships there is a great deal of pressure to perform as funding may be terminated. There also appeared to be a lack access of information among students on these opportunities, particularly for a postgraduate education. It was also noted that there were many irregularities in the disbursement of payments which led to drop outs as they were unable to fund the gap. In more extreme cases some students did not receive the full amount of the committed scholarship value. Reasons included corruption, cuts or fees, tax, and debt such as unpaid university fees and library sanctions for unreturned books. At the same time disadvantaged students require more than financial support, especially those who often experience cultural shock, isolation, or physical barriers to participate in academic and student life. Disadvantage is complex as it cross cuts many issues such as academic performance, cultural integration, and comfort with technology. These challenges can overwhelm and diminish the motivation of disadvantaged students to stay in university. Compounding this is the fact that there is a low demand among university staff to participate in inclusive education trainings.

Equity in Education

Until now, it is still believed that access to higher education is limited to people from middle and upper socio-economic class. Though very clear stated by (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2001) that education from an economic perspective is an opportunity to improve workability, professionalism, and social status, therefore students who have the opportunity to study in university will have a greater opportunity to earn a high income and better career. Unfortunately, people from lower economic class, who supposed to be the main target to be improved by education system; find difficulties to access higher education. Even though Indonesia has provided a wide range of scholarship schemes to help people from lower economic class but the dissemination of information is done through the media that are not accessible to lower class communities. According to (Yang, 2006), the choice of media in purpose to disseminate information (specifically in learning process) is reflection of equality. This condition shows that even in dissemination information, the disadvantage students experience inequality.

The lack of assistance to the group from lower economic class is causing them increasingly difficult to access higher education. In addition, scholarships are usually awarded based on competency not socio-economic conditions. Thus, if a group of students from the lower economic classes must compete based on the competence of knowledge, and then they will find it hard to succeed, because they generally attend the basic education in remote areas where the quality of education is relatively lower compared to other regions in Indonesia. This condition affects difficulties to disadvantage people/student (lower socio-economic condition; remote areas; and particular ethnic) and it makes their condition worse. Supposedly, the indicators of success in basic education are the ability of
graduates to enter university (Asplund, Adbelkarim, & Skalli, 2008). Equity has two basic meanings in the economic jargon: a horizontal and a vertical one. The horizontal one refers to the necessity of avoiding discrimination (in terms of gender, ethnic group or any other form) among individuals that are equal from a material point of view (they have identical results in economic terms). Vertical equity consists in reducing the economic differences among individuals. It is put into practice through the redistribution function of the state and implies the use of the public budget to redistribute income towards the underprivileged categories, either directly by transfer or by negative taxation or indirectly by providing free or subsidized goods or services (Livia & Laura, 2009).

Fortunately, in 2010 the Indonesian government launched a very good program with a noble purpose. The program is called “BidikMisi”, which aims to provide services and facilities, as well as ensuring the quality education for every citizen without discrimination, and shall provide support community resources in education. To organize quality education requires considerable cost. Therefore, every student at the educational unit is entitled to tuition assistance for those who have good academic potential and economically disadvantaged and are entitled to scholarships for high achievers. This program helps the students as much as 20,000 in 2010 and is growing very rapidly to 30,000 in 2011 and to 42,000 in 2012 and increased to 61,000 in 2013, while for 2014; the government will provide assistance to the 60,000 prospective students (Santoso, 2014).

Research Framework

The paradigm of this research is qualitative, where all data were collected and analyzed qualitatively. Data collection conducted two times in west of Indonesia and east of Indonesia. Each area provided 30 lecturers and 6 students as informants (respondents). They were selected from various universities where the choice university mixed between public and private university; small, medium and large university in terms of numbers of the student body; rural and urban area. Lecturers were selected with this proportion: lecturer who also has role in management of university (i.e. dean, vice dean, head of department, research and publication director, academic director, etc.); lecturer who has direct responsibility in student development and lecturer who has responsibility merely in teaching process. These 30 lecturers divided into six groups. Each groups were also add 1 informant from group of students. Therefore, there are six groups; each group consists of six informants. Focus group discussion (FGD) was facilitated by one facilitator who gave the topic to be discussed among the groups member. One person assists the research process by recorded the discussion process and one who wrote the process. The research p was conducted two times in west and east of Indonesia.

Supporting Program for Disadvantage Students

Data is gathered by interviewing respondents in focus group discussion model. A group formation model was used to proportionally determine the number of people in each group in order for the discussion to run effectively and for each participant to voice their opinion and listen to others. Overall, the discussion was conducted in an interactive, casual, and relaxed mood without losing the essence of the discussion itself. Each group was asked the same questions about the ways in which students from disadvantaged groups have more open access to entrance into university and how to improve the success rate in completing his education in the university. From the discussion, there are some findings that are grouped in three parts, namely increasing access to universities for disadvantaged students; increase the success rate for students who have entered university and the last is how to increase the success of the program.

As for improving access, the only two points presented, namely: (1) Universities shall adopt and implement socially inclusive policies and programs that encourage the acceptance and enrolment of disadvantaged students.
(2). Prepare for the admission and support of disabled students and promote their preparedness. Establish a division within each university to support disabled students and conduct needs assessments and planning for the creation of infrastructure and learning systems for them. Grant funds could be used to build infrastructure such as wheelchair ramps, or to recruit education assistants to shadow and support their learning.

There are several findings found from the discussion, such as: in general, the universities in which the participants worked and studied did not have students with disabilities. This was based on the fact that no disabled students applied in their universities, with the exclusion of two universities (respondents) which claimed that they had received applications from disabled students who unfortunately failed in the selection process. Nonetheless, all participants agreed to provide opportunity and support for disabled students in their respective institutions by creating a special enrollment selection process and assistance from senior students who can help the disabled students throughout their study time. The other finding is almost all universities received students with financial disadvantage but claimed that the opportunities for these students were widely open due to the scholarships offered by both the central and district governments. However, it is worth noticing that the scholarships, which covered both the academic and living expenses, were often mismanaged by the people in charge that they failed to, reach the targeted group. In general, awardees from low economic status possessed the required level of intelligence to undertake high education, because they had to pass a strict selection to receive the scholarships.

After students finally able to study in university there are several common reasons for their failure in finishing their study was their personality and character. Some of the success barriers for these students included low self-esteem, lack of courage, bad communication skills, and the pressure to upgrade their lifestyles. Therefore, several suggestions were given to improve the success rate for these students, including: (1). A sustainable tutoring or mentoring program. Dedicated lecturers or students who have the calling for the program will be selected as tutors or mentors. This program will benefit for disadvantage students to ensure the success of disadvantaged students such as education assistants as an appropriate learning support systems, student mentoring, soft skills development, self-help and empowerment programs to become independent, study to work programs as well as education materials adapted to their needs. Student organizations and bodies could also be called upon to be active in supporting those that are disadvantaged. (2). A matriculation program for new students. Materials for the program will be taken from skill standardization related to the chosen study program as well as personality development and life skills materials. Providing matriculation and bridging classes for those disadvantaged students that may have learning difficulties or are falling behind to ensure retention and support those that perform well to participate in internal and external academic competitions, as well as student exchange programs. (3). Soft skills centers. These centers will help develop additional skills such as personality and character development, leadership, entrepreneurship tutorial, communication skills, writing and problem-solving and many more. (4). Students roles improvement. Students must be encouraged to play more roles, both on and off the classroom, by holding a joint-research or joining student organizations, internship, competitions, and others. For this purpose, the program have to make the commitment to disburse scholarship payments covering academic and living expenses on-time and have zero-tolerance for corruption in the administration of these funds. It is also important to create financial incentives for disadvantaged students to support their studies and success. For instance, assist disadvantaged students with a scholarship to complete their thesis research or provide free student accommodation. A monitoring mechanism should also be designed to ensure that incentives are received by the right parties and used appropriately. (5). an integrated curriculum. It is essential that the curriculum allows the students to have an improved knowledge of the program they choose and a good personality and character to go with their skills. For the group of disabled students, it needs to develop curriculum accessible and appropriate for the learning needs of disabled students. This should adhere to international guidelines.
and cater for disabilities such as blindness, deafness and so on. Care should also be taken to develop special learning materials for the disabled, especially for the blind and deaf. The last but not least is (6). To develop a management and evaluation system to track the progress of disadvantaged students (particularly those on scholarships) by classifying their needs, setting indicators of performance and monitoring the implementation of the inclusive education policy as it relates to their individual circumstance.

Respondents from the group of disadvantage students were basically aware of the need for activities that will stimulate their creative minds. They also realized that they needed a broader knowledge of places outside their area in order to understand the others way of life. To achieve this, they may be required to leave their residence and conduct student/lecturer exchange and or trips to other places to broaden their perspective. In other side, respondents from the group of lecturer said they need to receive special programs such as workshops, trainings and mentoring. It is hoped that these programs will increase the lecturers’ creativity and teaching ability, which will eventually affect students’ ability to understand and learn. Therefore, some recommended program propose as follows: (1). Provide special needs training for university staff how to treat disabled students appropriately and ensure a learning environment conducive to the success of disabled students. This may be supported by arranging staff to visit universities with good systems in place for the disabled and encouraged with the institution of incentives for lecturers who can fully assist disabled students. (2). Follow the best practice set by disability-friendly universities domestically and internationally as well as facilitate wherever possible the visit of staff and student leaders to these institutions to learn more from their example. Additionally universities could facilitate workshops to be held with visiting national and international leaders in the provision of education to the disabled to share lessons learned. (3). Initiate campaigns that would reduce the stigma towards disabled people and facilitate interaction between disabled students and the wider student community by setting up a mentorship program. This could also be supported by field trips to leave the student residence and national or international exchange programs. Socialization should also extend beyond the campus to include local government and businesses to ease graduate transition from study to work. (4). Monitor the performance of disabled students rigorously, adapted with external environment changing and celebrates their achievements.

The other important finding from this group discussion is the fact that limitation in information and communication technology devices in campus environment. It is also an important aspect to consider. Life trend in general and campus life trend in particular require a good access to information technology. As a result, infrastructure provision, particularly information technology devices (hardware, software, and networking), is essential to achieve success in teaching, research, and students success rate increase for every university.

Conclusion

This study concluded the need to widely open the access for disadvantage students to enter the university. This study also concludes six programs that are considered important to improve the success rate of disadvantage students to finish their study at the university. They are: provide mentoring program; conduct matriculation, establish soft skills center, increase the role of disadvantage student, develop an integrated curriculum and develop monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure the successful of disadvantage student.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


