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Understanding the Path of the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) of the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines: Basis for Activity Framework

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Abstract

Aim: This research delved into the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) framework developed by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines.

Methodology: This research employed conceptual analysis as the primary research method.

Results: The study explored the said conceptual framework, aligned it with the Basis for Activity Framework, and identified specific activities for each phase. The findings highlight the potential for seamless professional mobility and collaboration among ASEAN countries. The integrated Activity Framework adds a structured approach to MRPQ execution.

Conclusion: The five-phase approach to the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) stands as a comprehensive and strategically designed framework. This approach transcends the conventional boundaries of Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) within the ASEAN region, offering a nuanced and pragmatic strategy. The culmination of each phase serves as a building block for the next, ensuring a holistic and well-rounded strategy. The essence of the framework encompasses empirical research, stakeholder engagement, international collaboration, legal formalization, and practical implementation

Keywords: Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ), Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), Professional Mobility, ASEAN Region, Activity Framework

INTRODUCTION

The professional landscape in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region has undergone significant transformation, driven by the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. Among the core objectives of the AEC is the promotion of professional mobility and the harmonization of qualifications to enable skilled professionals to work seamlessly across borders within ASEAN member states.

The Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) has emerged as a pivotal framework in the global labor market, particularly in regions striving for economic integration. In the context of the Philippines, this takes on added significance due to the country's active participation in the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The AEC aims to transform ASEAN into a region with free movement of goods, services, investment, skilled labor, and a freer flow of capital. One of its key components is the MRPQ, which facilitates the mobility of professionals across member states.

The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines plays a crucial role in this landscape. As the agency responsible for the licensure and regulation of various professions, the PRC is at the forefront of implementing and managing MRPQ policies. This is particularly relevant in a country like the Philippines, which not only has a diverse range of regulated professions but also a significant number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs).



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Since 2018, there has been a growing emphasis on aligning local professional standards with international norms. This is not only to foster mobility but also to ensure that Filipino professionals are competitive on a global scale. Various sectors, such as healthcare, engineering, and architecture, have been the focus of these alignment efforts.

Moreover, the Philippines has bilateral and multilateral agreements concerning MRPQ, most notably within the ASEAN framework. These agreements often involve mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs) that allow professionals from one country to have their qualifications recognized in another. Such arrangements are critical for the Philippines, given its burgeoning young population seeking employment opportunities both locally and internationally.

The MRPQ pathway, facilitated by the PRC, serves as a cornerstone for professional mobility, not just within the ASEAN region but also globally. Understanding this pathway is essential for several stakeholders, including policymakers, educational institutions, and the professionals themselves. This study aims to delve into this intricate pathway, offering insights that could serve as a basis for an activity framework geared towards more effective policy implementation.

Understanding the intricacies of the MRPQ path pursued by the PRC is of paramount importance. It not only facilitates the recognition of Filipino professionals abroad but also ensures the reciprocal recognition of foreign professionals within the Philippines, contributing to a vibrant and dynamic workforce. This research seeks to explore this vital aspect of professional mobility, shedding light on the conceptual framework that underpins the MRPQ process.

Significance of the Research

This research holds substantial significance in several key dimensions:

1. **Policy Informed Decision-Making:** The findings of this study are poised to inform policymakers, regulators, and stakeholders involved in shaping policies related to professional mobility and qualification recognition. A thorough understanding of the conceptual framework can lead to more informed decision-making.
2. **Enhanced Professional Mobility:** A clearer conceptual understanding of the MRPQ path can contribute to the seamless recognition of professional qualifications across borders, facilitating enhanced professional mobility within ASEAN.
3. **Theoretical Contribution:** This research adds to the theoretical foundations of MRPQ and policy analysis by delving into the conceptual aspects of professional mobility, bridging theory and practice.
4. **Interdisciplinary Impact:** The interdisciplinary nature of conceptual analysis fosters dialogue and collaboration across various fields, promoting a holistic approach to addressing challenges in the recognition of professional qualifications.

The significance of this research aligns with the broader goal of facilitating skilled labor mobility and harmonizing professional qualifications in the region.

Definition of Key Terms

1. Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ):

MRPQ refers to a collaborative agreement between countries or regions that allows professionals, such as doctors, engineers, or accountants, to have their qualifications and credentials recognized in another jurisdiction, enabling them to practice their professions across borders.



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2. Professional Regulation Commission (PRC):

The PRC is a government agency in the Philippines responsible for regulating and supervising various professions and professionals to ensure that they meet established standards and qualifications.

3. Professional Mobility:

Professional mobility encompasses the ability of individuals in regulated professions to move and practice their occupation freely within and across countries or regions without significant barriers or restraints.

4. ASEAN Region:

The ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region comprises ten member states in Southeast Asia, namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, which collaborate on various economic, political, and social initiatives.

5. Activity Framework:

The Activity Framework is a structured and comprehensive plan that outlines specific actions, tasks, and milestones to be undertaken at each phase of a project or initiative. It provides guidance on the execution of activities to achieve defined objectives and ensures alignment with strategic goals and principles.

Literature Review

A. Overview of Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ)

The Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) represents a pivotal dimension in the landscape of international and regional agreements aimed at fostering the mobility of skilled professionals. This subsection provides an in-depth exploration of MRPQ, elucidating its foundational principles, operational mechanisms, and its critical role in facilitating the global exchange of professional expertise.

Historical Evolution

MRPQ agreements have evolved significantly over the past decade, both on a global scale and within specific regional contexts such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In the wake of globalization and the pursuit of a more integrated global workforce, international discussions surrounding the mutual recognition of professional qualifications have gained prominence (Enemark & Plimmer, 2023; Carvajal, et al, 2023).

Objectives and Significance

The overarching objectives of MRPQ are inherently aligned with the goals of economic integration and professional mobility. These objectives encompass the facilitation of professional mobility across borders, the enhancement of regional economic integration, and the nurturing of cooperative relationships among member states (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). As a result, MRPQ agreements have become integral to promoting economic growth and harmonizing professional standards within and beyond regional contexts.

Mechanisms and Processes

The operational mechanisms underpinning MRPQ are intricate, involving multifaceted processes. These processes include the evaluation and recognition of qualifications acquired in different jurisdictions, the assessment of professional competencies, and the establishment of dispute resolution mechanisms to address any conflicts that may arise (Bates, et al. 2021; Carvajal, et al, 2023). The meticulous nature of these mechanisms ensures a rigorous yet streamlined approach to the recognition of qualifications.

Stakeholders

The development, implementation, and oversight of MRPQ agreements require the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders. International organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional bodies like ASEAN play pivotal roles in shaping and overseeing these agreements (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). Additionally, government entities, professional associations, and regulatory bodies all contribute to the design and execution of MRPQ frameworks (APEC Group on Services, 2021; Carvajal, 2023).



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The literature review has provided a comprehensive overview of the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ). It has highlighted the historical evolution of MRPQ agreements, elucidated their objectives and significance, outlined the intricate mechanisms and processes involved, and underscored the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders in shaping and implementing these agreements. This foundation serves as a springboard for the subsequent exploration of the role of Professional Regulation Commissions (PRCs) in the MRPQ process, as well as the conceptual frameworks underpinning policy and decision-making in this context.

B. Role of Professional Regulation Commissions in MRPQ

Professional Regulation Commissions (PRCs) play a multifaceted and indispensable role within the realm of Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ). Their functions span across evaluation, regulation, and collaboration, all of which are crucial in ensuring the seamless recognition of qualifications and the facilitation of professional mobility (Professional Regulation Commission, 2016).

Responsibilities of PRCs

PRCs shoulder the weighty responsibility of evaluating and endorsing professional qualifications for recognition within the MRPQ framework (Mendoza & Sugiyarto, 2017; Carvajal, et al, 2023). They are the gatekeepers who meticulously scrutinize foreign qualifications, seeking alignment with local standards. PRCs are charged with safeguarding the quality and relevance of professional qualifications, thereby ensuring the competence and credibility of professionals crossing borders.

Standards and Guidelines

PRCs are not just evaluators; they also serve as architects of standards and guidelines for the assessment of foreign qualifications. These standards are pivotal in providing a structured framework for the assessment process, ensuring fairness and consistency. They are essential tools for PRCs to ascertain the equivalency and comparability of qualifications across borders (Rivera, et al, 2019).

Collaborative Endeavors

Collaboration is the cornerstone of MRPQ, and PRCs are at the forefront of fostering this cooperation. They actively engage with their counterparts in other ASEAN member states (Mendoza & Sugiyarto, 2017). Regular consultations, information sharing, and harmonization efforts are undertaken to ensure the smooth functioning of the MRPQ process (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019; Carvajal, et al, 2023). The collaborative spirit among PRCs underpins the success of the entire MRPQ system.

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite their pivotal role, PRCs encounter both challenges and opportunities within the MRPQ landscape. Challenges include the need for harmonization of standards across diverse jurisdictions and the assurance of quality and consistency in the recognition of qualifications. However, opportunities arise from the potential for knowledge sharing, the alignment of professional practices, and the enrichment of cross-border collaborations.

C. Conceptual Frameworks in Policy and Decision-Making

Conceptual frameworks serve as the intellectual scaffolding that underpins policy development and decision-making processes. In the context of Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ), these frameworks offer a structured approach to understanding the intricate web of concepts and relationships that shape the recognition of qualifications across borders.

Conceptual frameworks hold a critical role in policy and decision-making. They facilitate clarity by providing a common understanding of key concepts and their relationships. They offer a lens through which policymakers can analyze complex issues and formulate coherent strategies. These frameworks enable the systematic exploration of assumptions, terminologies, and the theoretical underpinnings of policy decisions.

Within the realm of MRPQ, conceptual frameworks can be applied to disentangle the intricate concepts that govern the recognition of professional qualifications. They allow for the systematic examination of terms like



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"equivalency," "competency," and "mutual recognition". Moreover, they provide a structured approach to understanding the relationships between various stakeholders, standards, and policies that shape MRPQ within ASEAN (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019).

The development of a robust conceptual framework is instrumental in laying the groundwork for an Activity Framework that can guide future actions and decisions related to MRPQ (ASEAN Secretariat, 2019). By providing a structured understanding of the key concepts within MRPQ, conceptual frameworks are instrumental in creating a foundation for effective policy development and decision-making.

Research Objectives

Research Problem Statement

The core research problem addressed in this study revolves around the need to comprehensively understand the MRPQ path undertaken by the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines. This path encompasses a complex web of concepts, policies, and procedures related to the recognition of professional qualifications within the ASEAN region.

The problem arises from the inherent complexity and diversity of professional qualifications and regulations across ASEAN member states. Consequently, there is a pressing need to elucidate the conceptual framework underpinning the MRPQ process. This understanding is crucial for policymakers, regulators, and stakeholders involved in facilitating professional mobility and ensuring the recognition of qualifications.

Research Questions

To address the research problem, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the conceptual framework of the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) path within the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines?
2. How do the key concepts within the MRPQ path relate to one another, and what are the underlying theoretical frameworks that inform them?
3. In what ways can a deep understanding of these concepts and their interconnections serve as a basis for an Activity Framework that guides future actions and decisions related to MRPQ within the PRC and the broader ASEAN context?

Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To comprehensively analyze and define the conceptual framework underpinning the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) path within the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines.
2. To identify and examine the interconnections and relationships among key concepts within the MRPQ path, elucidating the theoretical foundations that inform their usage.
3. To leverage the deep understanding gained from conceptual analysis to establish a robust basis for an Activity Framework that can guide future actions and decisions pertaining to MRPQ within the PRC and the broader ASEAN context.



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METHOD

A. Conceptual Analysis as a Research Method

This research employed conceptual analysis as the primary research method. Within the context of the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) path, Conceptual analysis is a qualitative research approach that offers a structured and systematic means of dissecting complex concepts and their interrelationships (Pamplona, 2022).

Conceptual analysis encompasses several key facets (Stenlund, & Slottsån, 2018):

1. Terminology Clarification: A central aspect of conceptual analysis involves the clarification of terminology associated with the subject of study. It seeks to define and refine key terms and concepts to establish a common understanding among researchers and stakeholders
2. Identification of Relationships: Conceptual analysis delves beyond surface-level definitions and strives to identify the intricate relationships and dependencies among concepts. It seeks to elucidate how these concepts are interrelated within the MRPQ framework
3. Theoretical Exploration: This research method also engages in theoretical exploration. It seeks to unearth the underlying theoretical frameworks that inform the usage and significance of the concepts under investigation
4. Contextualization: Conceptual analysis contextualizes concepts within their specific settings. It accounts for variations in the interpretation and application of concepts across different ASEAN member states, considering their implications for the MRPQ process

Conceptual analysis offers a structured and rigorous approach to unraveling the complexities within the MRPQ path. It enables a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the intricate concepts that govern professional mobility and qualification recognition.

B. Selection Criteria for Concepts

The selection of concepts for analysis within this research is guided by specific criteria to ensure relevance and comprehensiveness:

1. Centrality to MRPQ: Concepts chosen for analysis must be central to the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process. They should play a pivotal role in shaping the recognition of qualifications and facilitating professional mobility.
2. Complexity and Interconnectedness: Concepts selected should exhibit complexity and interconnectedness with other key concepts within the MRPQ path. Their intricate relationships provide fertile ground for in-depth analysis.
3. Variability Across ASEAN: Concepts should demonstrate variability in their interpretation and application across different ASEAN member states. This criterion accounts for the diversity of regulatory landscapes within ASEAN and the need to navigate these variations effectively.
4. Theoretical Relevance: Concepts should possess theoretical relevance, implying that they are informed by theoretical frameworks that guide their usage. This criterion aids in uncovering the theoretical foundations underpinning MRPQ.

The selection criteria ensure that the chosen concepts for analysis are not only fundamental to MRPQ but also offer a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of qualification recognition and professional mobility.



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These concepts serve as the bedrock for the subsequent development of an Activity Framework that guides future actions and decisions related to MRPQ within the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) and the broader ASEAN context.

C. Rationale for Conceptual Analysis

The choice of employing conceptual analysis as the research method for this study is grounded in the intricate nature of the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) path and its conceptual underpinnings within the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines.

Conceptual analysis is particularly apt for this research for the following reasons:

1. **Clarity and Precision:** Conceptual analysis enables a precise examination of the key concepts involved in the MRPQ process. This method facilitates a clear and systematic exploration of the terminology, definitions, and underlying assumptions that shape these concepts.
2. **Depth of Understanding:** By dissecting the concepts, conceptual analysis allows for a profound understanding of their meaning, structure, and interrelationships. It provides a framework for uncovering implicit knowledge and theoretical foundations.
3. **Contextual Exploration:** Given the context-dependent nature of the MRPQ path, conceptual analysis helps in contextualizing the concepts, considering their variations across ASEAN member states, and understanding their significance within the regional framework.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Understanding MRPQ and the Steps

Mutual recognition of professional qualifications is a process where two or more countries agree to acknowledge and accept the qualifications and credentials of professionals from each other's countries. This allows professionals to work and practice their professions in another country without having to go through additional training or examinations.

Mutual recognition of professional qualifications is a process that allows professionals to have their qualifications recognized in another country. It is usually established through bilateral or multilateral agreements between countries.

The process typically involves the following steps:

1. **Assessment:** The competent authority in the receiving country assesses the qualifications of the applicant. This assessment may include evaluating the applicant's education, training, and experience to determine if they meet the required standards in the receiving country.
2. **Equivalence:** If the qualifications are deemed equivalent to the receiving country's standards, the applicant may be granted recognition of their professional qualifications. This means they can practice their profession in the receiving country without having to complete additional training or exams.
3. **Compensation measures:** In some cases, if there are substantial differences between the qualifications of the applicant and the receiving country's standards, compensation measures may be required. These measures could include additional training, exams, or supervised practice to bridge the gaps in knowledge or skills.
4. **Registration:** Once the recognition is granted, the applicant can register with the relevant professional body or authority in the receiving country. This allows them to legally practice their profession and enjoy the same rights and privileges as locally qualified professionals.



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It is essential to acknowledge that the procedures and criteria for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications may differ depending on the country and the specific profession. It is prudent to seek comprehensive information and guidance by consulting with the relevant authorities or professional organizations in both the country of origin and the destination country.

Benefits of MRPQ

Mutual recognition of professional qualifications refers to an agreement between two or more countries to recognize and accept the qualifications of professionals from another country. The benefits of mutual recognition of professional qualifications include:

1. Facilitating the mobility of professionals across borders, which can lead to increased job opportunities and career growth (Papademetriou, et al, 2016).
2. Reducing the costs and administrative burden associated with obtaining new qualifications or licenses in another country.
3. Enhancing the quality of services provided by professionals, as those who have been recognized as qualified in their home country are likely to have met rigorous standards.
4. Promoting international cooperation and understanding by facilitating the exchange of knowledge and expertise between countries

Overall, mutual recognition of professional qualifications can help to create a more efficient, effective, and globally connected workforce.

Limitations or restrictions to MRPQ

Limitations or restrictions to MRPQ can vary depending on the specific agreement or arrangement between the countries or regions involved.

Some common limitations or restrictions may include:

1. Language requirements: The recognition process may require candidates to demonstrate proficiency in the language of the country or region where they plan to work.
2. Differences in qualification standards: If the qualifications required for a profession differ significantly between countries, it may be difficult to achieve mutual recognition (Hamanaka & Jusoh, 2018).
3. Differences in regulatory requirements: The regulatory requirements for a profession may differ between countries, which could impact the mutual recognition of professional qualifications.
4. Limited scope of recognition: Mutual recognition agreements may only apply to certain professions, or may only recognize certain levels of qualifications .

It's important to research and understand the specific limitations and restrictions that apply to mutual recognition of professional qualifications in the countries or regions that you are interested in.

The MRPQ of PRC: The Five-Phase Approach to MRPQ by the Professional Regulation Commission as a Complementary Framework to MRA (Cueto, 2022)

The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines has developed a five-phase approach to the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ). This approach, as outlined by Cueto (2022, 2022, 2023), is a comprehensive framework that goes beyond the existing Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) within



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the ASEAN region. Each phase serves as a building block for the next, ensuring a holistic and well-rounded strategy. Below is an elaboration of each phase:

Phase 1: Research and Data Gathering

The first phase is fundamentally rooted in empirical research and data collection. The PRC undertakes a comprehensive analysis to identify gaps in professional competencies and credentialing systems in ASEAN countries that are frequent destinations for Filipino professionals. This phase serves as the bedrock upon which the subsequent phases are built. The data gathered here informs the PRC's strategy for alignment and non-alignment of professional qualifications, ensuring that the approach is evidence-based.

Phase 2: Alignment and Non-Alignment; Involvement of External Consultants

In the second phase, the focus shifts to the alignment and non-alignment of professional qualifications and standards. The PRC collaborates with external consultants who bring specialized expertise to the table. These consultants assist in comparing the professional standards, competencies, and qualifications between the Philippines and target ASEAN countries. Their insights help in identifying specific areas where harmonization is feasible and beneficial, thereby making the approach more targeted and effective.

Phase 3: Visit Counterparts, Conduct Meetings, Reach Consensus, and Validate Research

The third phase involves direct engagement with foreign counterparts. PRC representatives visit these jurisdictions to conduct meetings with their respective regulatory bodies and professional organizations. These meetings serve multiple purposes: they allow for the validation of research findings, facilitate discussions on potential alignments and non-alignments, and aim to reach a consensus on mutual recognition. This phase adds a layer of practicality and real-world testing to the approach, ensuring that it is both robust and adaptable.

Phase 4: Signed Agreement Instrument; Commitment

The fourth phase culminates in the formalization of the mutual recognition initiative through the signing of legal instruments. These documents serve as a commitment from both parties to recognize each other's professional qualifications. This phase is critical as it provides the legal and formal structure that makes the initiative enforceable, thereby transitioning the project from planning to implementation.

Phase 5: Mobility

The final phase focuses on the actual mobility of professionals. With the legal instruments in place, Filipino professionals can now practice in the partner ASEAN countries, and vice versa. This phase involves the practical aspects of professional mobility, such as the issuance of licenses and the recognition of credentials. It serves as the ultimate test of the effectiveness of the previous phases and is the realization of the PRC's goal for easier, more equitable professional mobility.

The PRC's five-phase approach to MRPQ, as outlined by Cueto (2022, 2022, 2023), is a comprehensive and well-thought-out strategy. It incorporates empirical research, stakeholder engagement, international collaboration, legal formalization, and practical implementation. This approach is particularly relevant for the Philippines, given its diverse professional landscape and the significant number of Filipino professionals seeking opportunities both within the ASEAN region and globally.



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II. MRPQ Phases as implemented by the PRC

Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ)

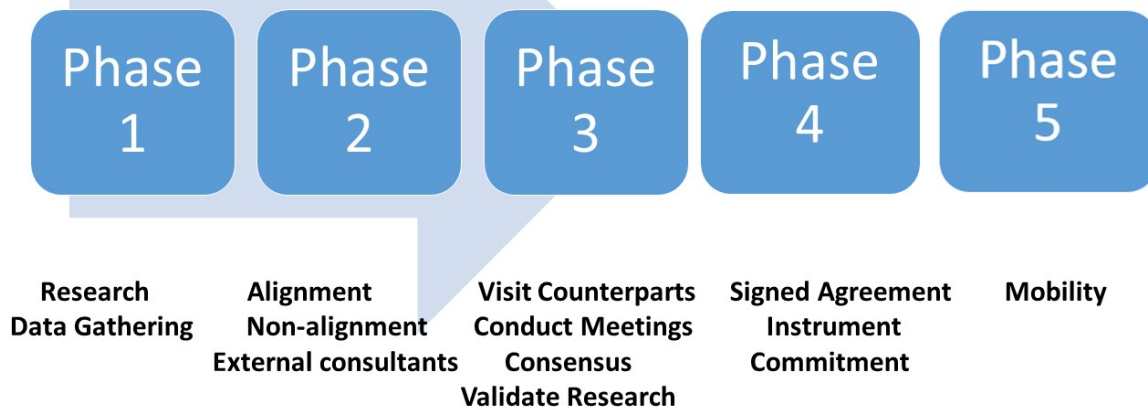


Figure 1.

MRPQ Phases as implemented by the PRC on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Cueto, 2022, 2022, 2023)

1. Phase 1 : Research and Data Gathering
2. Phase 2 : Alignment and Non-Alignment. External Consultants.
3. Phase 3: Visit Counterparts. Conduct Meetings. Consensus. Validate research.
4. Phase 4 : Signed agreement instrument. Commitment.
5. Phase 5 : Mobility.

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Features of Establishment of MRPQ: Bottom-Up Approach

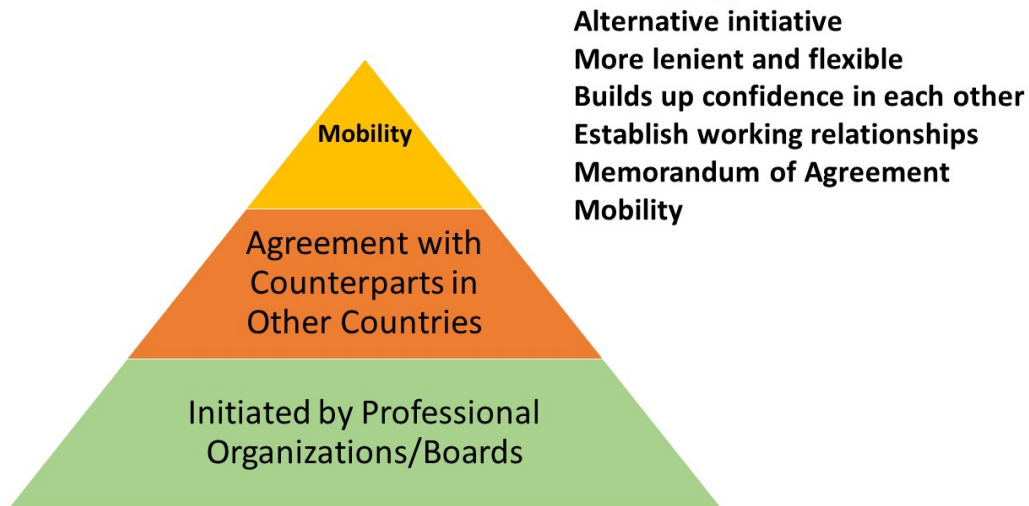


Figure 2.
Steps and Features of the Establishment of MRPQ (Cueto, 2022, 2022, 2023)

Steps of MRPQ:

1. Initiated by Professional Organizations/ Boards
2. Agreement with counterparts in other countries
3. Mobility

Features of MRPQ:

1. Compared to MRA, it is a Bottom-Up Approach.
2. Alternative initiative
3. More lenient and flexible;
4. Builds up confidence in each other.
5. Establish working relationships
6. Memorandum of Agreement.
7. Mobility.

Figure 2 presents the Features of the Establishment of MRPQ by the Professional Regulation Commission (Cueto, 2022). The Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) as conceptualized by Cueto (2022) presents a unique set of features that distinguish it from traditional Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs). These features are embedded in the steps involved in establishing MRPQ, which are initiated by professional organizations or boards, followed by agreements with counterparts in other countries, and finally, the facilitation of professional mobility. Below is a comprehensive discussion of these features:

Steps in the Establishment of MRPQ

1. **Initiated by Professional Organizations/Boards:** Unlike top-down approaches where governmental bodies dictate the terms, MRPQ starts at the grassroots level with professional organizations or boards taking the lead. This ensures that the people most affected by the arrangements have a say in their formulation.
2. **Agreement with Counterparts in Other Countries:** The second step involves reaching out to similar organizations in other countries to discuss and negotiate terms for mutual recognition. This is a critical step as it sets the stage for formal agreements and future collaborations.



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3. **Mobility:** The final step is the actualization of professional mobility, where professionals can practice in other countries that are part of the agreement. This is the ultimate goal and the measure of the initiative's success.

Features of MRPQ

1. **Bottom-Up Approach:** Unlike MRAs, which often involve top-down directives from governmental bodies, MRPQ adopts a bottom-up approach. This ensures greater involvement and buy-in from the professionals themselves, making the initiative more responsive to their needs (Cueto, 2022, 2022, 2023)
2. **Alternative Initiative:** MRPQ serves as an alternative to traditional MRAs, offering another pathway for professionals seeking to practice in other countries. This diversifies the options available and can be particularly useful when MRAs are not feasible or are too restrictive.
3. **More Lenient and Flexible:** MRPQ is designed to be more accommodating than traditional MRAs. It allows for greater flexibility in recognizing qualifications and credentials, thereby reducing bureaucratic hurdles and making mobility more attainable.
4. **Builds Up Confidence in Each Other:** The process of negotiation and agreement fosters trust and confidence among participating countries. This is crucial for the long-term success of any mutual recognition initiative.
5. **Establish Working Relationships:** Beyond the formal agreements, MRPQ facilitates the establishment of working relationships between professional organizations across countries. These relationships can be instrumental in resolving any issues that may arise in the future.
6. **Memorandum of Agreement:** A formal Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) is often the end product of the negotiations. This legal document outlines the terms and conditions of the mutual recognition and serves as a binding commitment from all parties involved.
7. **Mobility:** The ultimate goal of MRPQ is to facilitate the mobility of professionals across borders. This is not just about economic opportunities but also about the exchange of knowledge, skills, and cultural competencies.

The MRPQ framework offers a nuanced and flexible approach to mutual recognition of professional qualifications. Its bottom-up approach, initiated by professional organizations, ensures that the arrangement is both practical and tailored to the needs of the professionals it aims to serve.

Features of Establishment of MRAs: Top Down Approach

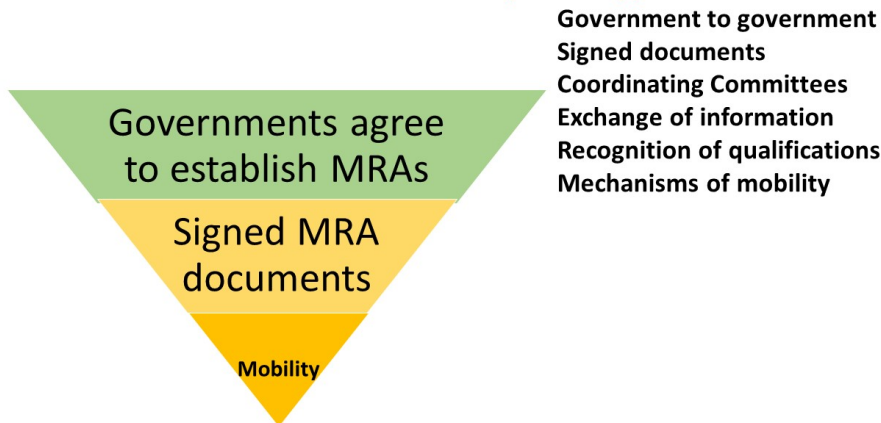


Figure 3.
 Steps and Features of the Establishment of MRA (Cueto, 2022, 2022, 2023)

Steps:

1. Governments agree to establish MRA
2. Signed MRA documents
3. Mobility



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Features:

1. This is a Top-Down approach compared to MRPQ
2. Government to Government
3. Signed documents
4. Coordinating committees
5. Exchange of information
6. Recognition of qualifications
7. Mechanisms of mobility

Figure 3 shows the features of the establishment of MRA. The Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRA) framework of PRC offers a distinct set of features that set it apart from the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ). The MRA is characterized by a top-down approach that is initiated and formalized by governmental bodies, leading to signed agreements and ultimately facilitating professional mobility. Below is an in-depth discussion of these features:

Steps in the Establishment of MRA

1. **Governments Agree to Establish MRA:** The process of establishing an MRA is initiated at the governmental level. This is a top-down approach that often involves formal diplomatic channels, high-level negotiations, and intergovernmental agreements.
2. **Signed MRA Documents:** After reaching an agreement, the involved governments sign formal MRA documents. These documents serve as the legal foundation for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications between the participating countries.
3. **Mobility:** The final step is the actualization of professional mobility, allowing professionals to practice in other countries that are part of the MRA. This is the ultimate goal and serves as a measure of the initiative's success.

Features of MRA

1. **Top-Down Approach:** Unlike MRPQ, which adopts a bottom-up approach, MRA is characterized by a top-down methodology. This is initiated and formalized by governments, making it more structured but potentially less responsive to the specific needs of professionals (Cueto, 2022).
2. **Government-to-Government:** The negotiations and agreements are conducted directly between governments, bypassing professional organizations and boards. This can expedite the process but may also result in less input from the professionals themselves.
3. **Signed Documents:** The formalization of the MRA is cemented through signed legal documents. These documents outline the terms and conditions for mutual recognition and are binding for all participating countries.
4. **Coordinating Committees:** To oversee the implementation and ongoing management of the MRA, coordinating committees are often established. These committees are responsible for ensuring compliance, resolving disputes, and facilitating communication between participating countries.
5. **Exchange of Information:** One of the key features of MRA is the systematic exchange of information between governments. This includes data on professional qualifications, licensing requirements, and other relevant metrics that aid in the mutual recognition process.
6. **Recognition of Qualifications:** The core objective of MRA is the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. This allows professionals to practice in other participating countries without having to undergo additional training or examinations.
7. **Mechanisms of Mobility:** The MRA establishes formal mechanisms to facilitate the mobility of professionals. This includes visa arrangements, licensing reciprocity, and other logistical considerations that make professional mobility feasible and efficient.

The MRA framework, as detailed by Cueto (2022), provides a structured, government-led approach to the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. While it offers the advantage of formal, intergovernmental agreements, it may lack the grassroots involvement seen in MRPQ initiatives. Understanding the distinct features of MRA is crucial for professionals and policymakers alike as they navigate the complexities of international professional mobility.



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Synthesis of Distinctions Between MRPQ and MRA

The Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) and Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRA) serve similar end goals—facilitating the mobility of professionals across borders. However, they differ significantly in their approaches, initiation, and implementation. Below is a synthesized comparison of these two frameworks:

Approach and Initiation

1. Top-Down vs. Bottom-Up: MRA is characterized by a top-down approach, initiated and formalized by governments. In contrast, MRPQ adopts a bottom-up approach, often initiated by professional organizations or boards. This fundamental difference impacts the agility and responsiveness of each framework to the specific needs of professionals.
2. Government-Led vs. Profession-Led: MRA is a government-to-government arrangement, making it more structured but potentially less nuanced. MRPQ, on the other hand, is often led by professional organizations, making it more attuned to the specific requirements and challenges of individual professions.

Implementation Phases

1. Formal Agreements vs. Research and Consultation: MRA moves quickly from governmental agreement to the signing of formal documents. MRPQ involves a more elaborate process that includes research, stakeholder consultation, and meetings with foreign counterparts before reaching the stage of signed agreements.
2. Coordinating Committees vs. External Consultants: MRA often involves the establishment of coordinating committees to oversee implementation. MRPQ may involve external consultants, especially in the phase of aligning and non-aligning professional qualifications.

Flexibility and Adaptability

1. Rigidity vs. Flexibility: MRA, being a formal intergovernmental agreement, tends to be more rigid and may take longer to adapt to changes. MRPQ is generally more flexible, allowing for adjustments based on research findings and stakeholder feedback.
2. Legal Binding vs. Memorandum of Agreement: MRA results in legally binding agreements that are enforceable. MRPQ often culminates in a Memorandum of Agreement, which, while formal, offers more room for modification and interpretation.

Mobility Mechanisms

1. Structured Mobility vs. Organic Mobility: MRA establishes formal mechanisms for mobility, including visa arrangements and licensing reciprocity. MRPQ's approach to mobility is more organic, growing out of the mutual confidence and working relationships established through research and consultation.

Transparency and Information Sharing

1. Systematic vs. Consensual Information Sharing: MRA involves the systematic exchange of information between governments. In MRPQ, information sharing is often more consensual, emerging from the research phase and stakeholder consultations.

While both MRPQ and MRA aim to facilitate professional mobility, their distinct approaches offer different advantages and limitations. MRA provides a more structured, government-led framework but may lack grassroots involvement. MRPQ, in contrast, offers a more nuanced and flexible approach but may require more time for research and alignment. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for policymakers, professionals, and academic researchers in the field of professional mobility.

Summary of Conceptual Analysis

The rigorous analysis of PRC's conceptual framework for the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) has yielded significant insights. Each concept within the framework has been carefully examined, unveiling a deeper understanding of its components, relationships, and theoretical underpinnings.



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Conceptual Components Unveiled: The analysis revealed that each concept in PRC's framework is composed of distinct components that define its essence. For instance, the concept of a "bottom-up approach" involves professional organizations or boards initiating MRPQ, granting autonomy to professionals, and actively engaging grassroots organizations. These components lay the groundwork for a responsive and inclusive approach.

Interconnected Relationships Explored: Beyond individual components, the analysis illuminated the intricate web of relationships among these concepts. Concepts like "building trust and confidence" during negotiations are vital for the success of MRPQ. Trust fosters collaboration and paves the way for mutual recognition. By exploring these relationships, the framework integrates diverse elements into a holistic strategy.

Empowering Grassroots Initiatives: PRC's emphasis on a "bottom-up approach" signifies the empowerment of professional organizations and grassroots involvement in MRPQ. This approach holds the potential to make MRPQ more responsive to the needs of professionals and their respective organizations. It highlights the importance of involving those directly affected by MRPQ arrangements in its formulation, thereby enhancing its relevance and effectiveness.

Alternative Pathways for Recognition: PRC's framework introduces MRPQ as an alternative to traditional Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs). This diversification of options provides flexibility to professionals seeking recognition in other countries. When MRAs are restrictive or unfeasible, MRPQ can offer a viable pathway for professionals to practice across borders.

Enhanced Trust and Collaboration: The concept of "building trust and confidence" through negotiations is central to PRC's framework. Trust is a currency that underpins successful international collaborations. As such, fostering trust among participating countries is pivotal not only for MRPQ but also for broader regional cooperation within ASEAN.

Streamlining and Clarifying Concepts: Our analysis identified areas where certain aspects of PRC's concepts could benefit from further clarification. This presents an opportunity for refinement and the development of a more streamlined and precise framework.

In essence, the implications of PRC's conceptual framework extend to reshaping how MRPQ is understood and approached. By empowering grassroots initiatives, diversifying recognition pathways, and emphasizing trust and collaboration, the framework has the potential to contribute significantly to the realization of equitable and efficient professional mobility within ASEAN and beyond.

The Activity Framework

Here are the specific activities for each of the five phases that will constitute the Activity Framework for the Professional Regulation Commission's (PRC) Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) approach:

Phase 1: Research and Data Gathering

1. **Data Collection:** Conduct comprehensive data collection on professional competencies and credentialing systems in ASEAN countries frequented by Filipino professionals.
2. **Gap Analysis:** Analyze the collected data to identify gaps in professional qualifications and standards.
3. **Evidence-Based Strategy:** Develop an evidence-based strategy for the alignment and non-alignment of professional qualifications.
4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage with relevant stakeholders within the PRC and external experts to ensure a well-rounded research approach.

Phase 2: Alignment and Non-Alignment; Involvement of External Consultants

1. **Alignment Assessment:** Assess the potential for alignment of professional qualifications and standards with target ASEAN countries.
2. **Consultant Engagement:** Collaborate with external consultants possessing specialized expertise in the respective fields.



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3. Comparative Analysis: Conduct a comparative analysis of professional standards, competencies, and qualifications between the Philippines and target ASEAN countries.
4. Targeted Harmonization: Identify specific areas where harmonization is feasible and beneficial based on consultant insights.

Phase 3: Visit Counterparts, Conduct Meetings, Reach Consensus, and Validate Research

1. International Visits: Organize visits to the jurisdictions of foreign counterparts, involving PRC representatives.
2. Stakeholder Meetings: Conduct meetings with regulatory bodies and professional organizations in target countries.
3. Research Validation: Validate research findings through discussions and interactions with foreign counterparts.
4. Consensus Building: Work towards reaching a consensus on mutual recognition terms and agreements.

Phase 4: Signed Agreement Instrument; Commitment

1. Legal Formalization: Draft legal instruments that formalize the mutual recognition initiative.
2. Signing Ceremony: Organize a signing ceremony involving both parties to commit to recognizing each other's professional qualifications.
3. Document Review: Ensure thorough review and compliance with legal requirements.
4. Implementation Planning: Begin planning for the implementation of the mutual recognition agreement.

Phase 5: Mobility

1. License Issuance: Develop a process for issuing licenses to Filipino professionals to practice in partner ASEAN countries and vice versa.
2. Credential Recognition: Establish a mechanism for the recognition of credentials across borders.
3. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of professional mobility.
4. Continuous Improvement: Continuously improve and refine the mobility process based on feedback and experience.

The Activity Framework, comprising these specific activities for each phase, will serve as a practical guide for the PRC in implementing its MRPQ approach. It ensures that each phase is systematically executed, contributing to the successful realization of easier and more equitable professional mobility within ASEAN and globally.

Conclusions

The Professional Regulation Commission's (PRC) five-phase approach to the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ), as elucidated by Cueto (2022), stands as a comprehensive and strategically designed framework. This approach transcends the conventional boundaries of Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) within the ASEAN region, offering a nuanced and pragmatic strategy. The culmination of each phase serves as a building block for the next, ensuring a holistic and well-rounded strategy. The essence of PRC's framework encompasses empirical research, stakeholder engagement, international collaboration, legal formalization, and practical implementation.

As explored, the MRPQ framework provides a profound understanding of the intricacies involved in achieving mutual recognition. It empowers grassroots initiatives, diversifies recognition pathways, fosters trust and collaboration, and emphasizes practical implementation. This framework is particularly relevant for the Philippines, given its diverse professional landscape and the significant number of Filipino professionals seeking opportunities both within the ASEAN region and on a global scale.

Furthermore, the alignment of this MRPQ framework with the Basis for Activity Framework presents a strategic synergy that can drive the successful execution of MRPQ initiatives. By leveraging grassroots input, diversifying recognition pathways, building trust, and emphasizing practical implementation, the alignment sets the stage for a holistic and effective approach to MRPQ within the PRC and the broader ASEAN context.



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This five-phase approach to MRPQ, combined with the development of an Activity Framework in alignment with the Basis for Activity Framework, holds the promise of transforming the landscape of professional mobility. It aspires to facilitate the seamless practice of professionals across borders, making this approach not only a driver of economic growth but also a catalyst for the exchange of knowledge, skills, and cultural competencies.

This research underscores the significance of the framework and its potential to contribute to the equitable and efficient mobility of professionals. It is a testament to the Philippines' commitment to fostering collaborative relationships within ASEAN and ensuring that the aspirations of Filipino professionals are met with tangible opportunities for success, both regionally and on the global stage.

Recommendations

1. Continuous Stakeholder Engagement:

The PRC should maintain open channels of communication and collaboration with professional organizations, regulatory bodies, and grassroots initiatives to ensure that MRPQ initiatives remain aligned with the needs and aspirations of Filipino professionals.

2. Strategic Policy Formulation:

The PRC should continue to prioritize empirical research and data gathering as the foundation of MRPQ strategies, as outlined in the Activity Framework. This ensures that policy decisions are well-informed and grounded in actual needs. It should also embrace the alternative pathway offered by MRPQ as a supplement to traditional Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs), recognizing that it provides flexibility and adaptability in response to evolving circumstances.

3. Trust-Building and Collaboration:

PRC should foster trust and collaboration among participating countries and organizations, as emphasized in the Activity Framework, and maintain ongoing dialogues and exchanges to build strong and enduring partnerships. Furthermore, it should develop mechanisms for conflict resolution and issue management, as outlined in the Activity Framework, to address any challenges that may arise during the implementation of MRPQ initiatives.

4. Practical Implementation:

PRC should ensure that the practical aspects of professional mobility, such as license issuance and credential recognition, are well-planned and executed, in line with the Activity Framework, and also implement monitoring and evaluation systems to track the effectiveness of mobility initiatives. Moreover, it should also establish feedback mechanisms that allow professionals to provide input and share their experiences, enabling continuous improvement of MRPQ processes, as highlighted in the Activity Framework.

5. Refinement of Conceptual Framework:

PRC should further refine and clarify certain aspects of its MRPQ framework, where needed, to streamline the approach and minimize potential ambiguities, as specified in the Activity Framework.

6. Advocacy and Awareness:

PRC should actively promote the benefits of MRPQ both within the Philippines and across ASEAN countries, as detailed in the Activity Framework. It should also create awareness among professionals and organizations about the opportunities and pathways for international recognition.

7. Ongoing Research and Adaptation:

PRC should commit to ongoing research and adaptation of MRPQ initiatives in response to changing circumstances, emerging trends, and evolving professional landscapes, as highlighted in the Activity Framework.

8. Activity Framework Implementation:

PRC should ensure that the specific activities outlined in the Activity Framework are executed systematically and effectively in alignment with the five phases of the MRPQ approach. Furthermore, it should also maintain thorough



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documentation of activities and progress, as per the Activity Framework, and provide regular reports to stakeholders for transparency and accountability.

These recommendations collectively form a roadmap for the PRC and relevant stakeholders to enhance and effectively implement the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) approach. By embracing evidence-based strategies, nurturing collaboration, and remaining adaptable, the Philippines can continue to lead in fostering equitable and efficient professional mobility within ASEAN and on the global stage.

Disclaimer:

The findings and conclusions presented in this research study are the author's independent and expert analysis and should not be attributed to or construed as endorsed by their affiliated institution or organization. The author assumes entire responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of this study.

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