Sustained Quality Assurance: Future-Proofing the Teachers for an ASEAN Higher Education Common Space

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Abstract

Aim: The study explored whether sustained QA indeed future-proofs the teachers for the ASEAN education common space. It described the levels of multicultural education and competence of teachers vis-à-vis the SEA-TCF through a survey of 349 randomly selected pre-service teachers of CALABARZON.
Methodology: This impact study utilized linear regression which yields an achieved statistical power of .999.
Results: Findings reveal that the TEIs of CALABARZON have continuously improved the quality of their teacher education programs through strengthened QA systems. They have the QA roadmap that may enable inclusion of international students and collaboration in the international educational landscape. Moreover, they have internationally inclusive education and pre-service teachers who have competencies aligned to the SEA-TCF. TEIs with stronger QA mechanisms have more internationally inclusive education to accommodate the socio-culturally diverse learners.
Conclusion: Sustained quality assurance initiatives future-proof the teachers for the international educational landscape. The study recommends the development of QA blueprints aimed at the development of better internationally-inclusive education and ASEAN-contextualized educators.

Keywords: QA roadmap, internationalization, SEA-TCF, ASEAN education common space

INTRODUCTION

The world is shifting toward a global community where people are exposed to more diverse cultures. Rather than cultures fading and replaced in favor of another, these are retained and are being adapted. This phenomenon is described as from having a cultural melting pot to cultural pluralism (Sleeter & Grant, 2003). This highlights that individuals who share diverse cultures should learn to live together. Because of this, many organizations promote the idea of Unity in Diversity (EU Motto, 2000). This cultural diversity creates unique interpersonal dynamics which may consequently lead to harmony or discord. With nations being more interconnected now more than ever, It is therefore essential to find ways to promote tolerance of others' culture and understanding of cultural differences.

The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), as a collective group, shares common ways of living through shared language, knowledge, beliefs, traditions, norms and other cultural elements. While cultural pluralism thrives in this ASEAN learning environment, there is also a growing recognition for the promotion of a shared sense of academic identity and consciousness. This merging of nations prompts the need to establish macro standards in education. Hence, the continuous dialogue to come up with unified regional standards where there is common space for ASEAN education. This transitions the relationship of ASEAN member nations from competition to collaboration.

The teacher is at the forefront of the goal towards learning. Thus, in context of regional standards and international landscape, there is a need to identify common teacher competency standards for the Southeast Asian Region. In anticipation to this, the key education leaders in the region through the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) developed the Southeast Asian Teacher Competency Framework (SEA-TCF). The main goal is to ensure that cultural diversity shall not hinder the quality of learning in context of an integrated AEC.

Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) strategize to keep pace with the volatile trends in education in the international scene through dynamic Quality Assurance (QA) systems. The anticipation to the most probable future outcomes as requirements in the international contexts, spelled out through developed regional standards, guide QA planning and initiatives. The global and regional mandates on Higher education development in ASEAN are the realization of the Sustainability Development Goal (SGD) 4 and commitment to the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education (2015). QA takes center stage in these pursuits. Through the development of QA Roadmap in education, fine-tuned to international standards and common visions of the region, HEIs are able to future-proof themselves and most particularly their teachers in context of the 21st century and AEC.

Given these underlying factors, there is an inherent need to conduct a study on the status of multicultural education in the Philippine HEIs, most particularly the Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) and the level of competence of the teachers vis-à-vis the SEA-TCF. Through these, the readiness to engage in international education is determined. The study also aims to make deeper analysis by breaking down the groups of TEIs according to their QA level. The main goal is to determine whether sustained QA indeed future-proofs the teachers towards the ASEAN educational landscape.

Objectives
The main objective of the study was to determine the impact of quality assurance to future-proofing the teachers in CALABARZON to the ASEAN education common space.

Specifically, it aimed to determine:
1. The QA levels of the TEIs;
2. The multicultural education level of TEIs;
3. The competency level of teachers vis-à-vis the SEA-TCF;
4. The variance in multicultural education based on QA level;
5. The variance in competency of teachers vis-à-vis the SEA-TCF based on QA level; and
6. The impact of QA on future-proofing the teachers to the ASEAN education common space.

Review of Related Literature

On Multicultural Education and Learning
The transmission and understanding of culture may be best achieved through education. However, education itself must first be a principal advocate of cultural pluralism. Multicultural education is when the academic community is accepting of all races, cultures, and religions (Souto-Manning, 2013). In understanding cultures, the models forwarded by Kluckholm and Strodtbeck, Hofstede, Hall, Trompenaars and Hampden-Tuner, Shalom Schwartz and Robert House are most widely cited (White, 2006). The early movements toward multicultural education emphasized consistency with the racial diversity like Sexism, LGBT, elderly, People with disabilities (Gorski & Reiter, 2012). School systems should be viewed then in a multicultural context wherein all aspects of the school had to be examined and transformed, including policies, teachers' attitudes, instructional materials, assessment methods, counseling, and teaching styles (Banks, 2004 as cited by Castagno, 2009). For systemic change to occur, the shift is from small curricular revisions to approaches that call for full transformations of self, schools, and society.

Learning is the universal goal of education. In a global education, there is a need to address issues in cultural diversity since it affects learning. Research findings suggest that there are adverse effects on learning of low Socio-economic Status and ethnicity (Snowman and McCown, 2015). Adding to this, Teacher Expectancy Effect due to culture bias affects student learning. In resolving these cultural issues in education, there are general principles that guide multicultural education. These general principles promote unity and diversity in schools which cuts across the different dimensions of educational practice (Wasonga & Piveral, 2004).

On Teacher Competency Frameworks for AEC
A report by SEAMEO-INNOTECH in 2010 highlights the need to develop a teacher competency framework which is common to the Southeast Asian countries. It narrates the lessons learned from the monitoring of the teaching competency standards in the region in adherence to the Dakar Framework. The findings of the audit on the development and implementation of teaching standards among 11-member countries of ASEAN reveal the trends that form part of the recommendations toward the identification of common regional standards for ASEAN teachers (SEAMEO, 2010). This form part of the converging actions in the development of the Asian Qualifications Referencing Frameworks (AQRF) aimed to enable and strengthen the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Furthermore, the Mutual

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Recognition Agreements (MRAs) reinforced the cooperation efforts for an AEC which paves way for a free-flow of skilled labor. The AEC blueprint is towards finding the common space for effective collaboration (AQRF, 2016). The Dakar Framework for action is an expression of commitment to act upon the previous targets of the overlying frameworks directed towards improvement of the quality of life. Specifically, it spells out the goals and objectives that the nations around the world should realize towards education for all (Dakar Framework for Action, 2000). A concrete output reflecting common standards for teachers in the region was developed and adapted by the region through the SEAMEO-INNOTECH Regional Education Program (SIREP). The standards focused on the key competencies for teachers of the AEC in context of the 21st Century. This was later updated and approved by the High Officials of the SEAMEO member countries On November 2017. This came to be known as the Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework (SEA-TCF) which SEAMEO INNOTECH worked on, as commissioned by the Teachers Council of Thailand (SEAMEO, 2011; 2018).

On Quality Assurance towards Internationalization of Education

Among the biggest challenges confronting higher educational institutions worldwide is internationalization. Such is its importance that resources and quality assurance mechanisms, including monitoring and evaluation initiatives, have been redirected to respond to this (Knight, 2000). Globalization consequently pushes colleges and universities to increase spending resources (McCarthy, 2007). This has captured the attention of regional economic organizations. Since the 1980s, European higher education institutions instituted quality assurance systems to utilize feedback towards continuous improvement. However, it has been noted that internationalization persists to confront QA directions and that regional standards remain a main consideration in QA planning (Jeliazkova and Westerheijden, 2002). For QA to be more effective therefore, the key is international collaboration among regional communities who share similar characteristics and visions. This has become the trend among regional partners in education. In the Asia-Pacific Region for example, the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) has redirected its focus to becoming a hub agency towards developing regional standards. This culture of collaboration is being prompted by the need for closer cooperation among nations due to the need for internationalization. The current trend is that different accrediting agencies strengthen their regional networks to come up with common evaluation tools and indicators of quality in education (Hinaga, 2004). This is also highlighted in the study of Sakamoto and Chapman (2012), wherein cross-border partnerships in education entail enhanced collaboration through sharing of best practices among QA systems. This strategy is advocated to education leaders who intends to chart the course of their institutions towards greater cross-border participation. This has also been the direction of QA systems in Southeast Asia through the establishment of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) in 2008 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The network advances mutual cooperation and recognition in higher education within the region (Basaruddin, 2019).

Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for 2030, Multicultural Education principles, Southeast Asia Teachers Competency Framework (SEA-TCF) and the ASEAN Vision on Education. The SGD 4 is focused on attaining quality education and as a global and regional mandate on Higher Education Development in ASEAN, should provide more accessible, relevant, and sustainable education (Babara, 2019).
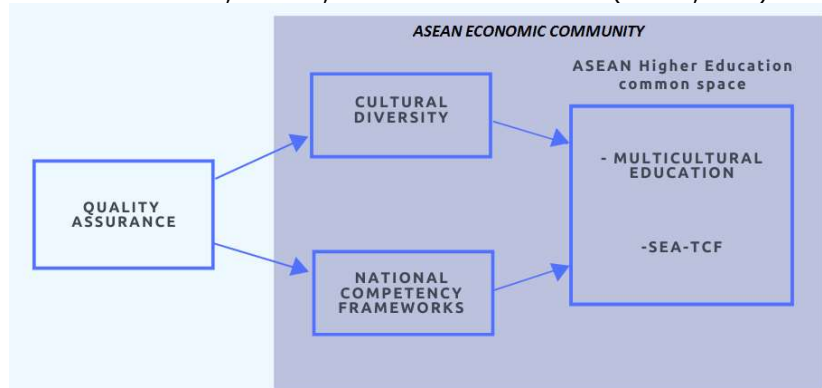

Figure 1. Quality Assurance as Predictor to Achieving an ASEAN Higher Education Common Space.

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The ASEAN Economic Community is confronted by issues related to cultural diversity and distinct national competency frameworks. An ASEAN common space may be realized when Quality Assurance systems positively impact the AEC realities where there is high observance to multicultural education practices and high levels of competencies vis-à-vis the SEA-TCF.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
The study operates on a quantitative framework, focusing on the cause-and-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables. In this study, the impact of quality assurance as the independent variables is being tested on the observance of multicultural education and the Southeast Asian teacher competency levels as the dependent variables.

Respondents
The 349 pre-service teachers, selected randomly from the different provinces of CALABARZON, served as the respondents of the study. The sample size yields an achieved statistical power of .999 under a small effect size (.15) and .05 alpha error probability using linear regression statistical test. As reflected table A, most of the respondents are pre-service teachers from TEIs in Batangas Province (25.5%), while the least are from the province of Rizal (12.9).

Table A. The Demographic Profile of the Respondents in terms of Province

Province	Frequency	Percent
Cavite	76	23.4
Laguna	66	20.3
Batangas	83	25.5
Rizal	42	12.9
Quezon	58	17.8
Total	325	100.0

No response = 24

Data Gathering Procedures
The study utilized a survey in the gathering of quantitative data. The questionnaire is composed of 3 parts. Part 1 yields data pertaining to their profile, including the QA level. Part 2 is composed of 19 statements that reflect the level of observance to multicultural education practices. Part 3 is composed of 31 statements which reflect the competency level of the respondents with regard to the SEA-TCF requirements. Both sets of statements have response options ranging from 1-4. Reliability estimates for the 19 items on multicultural education is .951, while for the 31 statements on teacher competencies is .961. The results suggest high acceptability of the items for both the sets of questionnaires.

The survey was conducted during the 2019 Philippine Association for Teachers and Educations (PAFTE) 4-A Annual Convention and Quiz bee at the Ynares Center, Rizal, last September 27, 2019. The questionnaires were given randomly to the participants composed of pre-service teachers of CALABARZON.

Data Analysis
The research used the IBM-SPSS version 22 software in the statistical analysis of data. The specific statistical tools used were: (1) frequency count and percent in determining the distribution of the respondents according to profile, (2) the weighted mean in determining the levels of observance of multicultural education practices and Southeast Asia teacher competencies, (3) the ANOVA, One-way in determining the variance in the levels of observance of multicultural education practices and Southeast Asia teacher competencies when the respondents are classified according to their QA levels, and (4) the linear regression in determining the impact of QA levels on the levels of observance of multicultural education practices and Southeast Asia teacher competencies.

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Ethical Considerations

The study complied with the ethical standards in the conduct and reporting of results in research. As such, informed consent was duly sought, and the results are reported in aggregate only. Necessary steps were conducted to ensure truthfulness and validity of the data and the confidentiality of the respondents was maintained.

FINDINGS

1. **Quality Assurance Level of the Respondents**

Table 1
The QA Levels of the Respondents

QA Level	Frequency	Percent
None	14	4.0
Candidate Status	39	11.3
Level 1	94	27.2
Level 2	130	37.6
Level 3	55	15.9
Level 4	14	4.0
Total	**346**	**100.0**

Most of the pre-service teacher-respondents in CALABARZON are under teacher education programs with level 2 status of accreditation. This reflects that the TEIs of the region have high levels of quality assurance. Furthermore, they have shown high standards of quality which may enable them to be more prepared for the inclusion of international students and for the international educational landscape. Only a very few institutions have either not shown commitment towards quality assurance or have shown excellent quality standards through mastery of quality assurance mechanisms.

2. **Observance of Multicultural Education Practices**

The results, shown in table 2, suggest that the teacher education institutions in the region observe multicultural education practices. This implies that the TEIs in the region are prepared for internationally inclusive education with regards to accommodating learners of diverse Southeast Asian socio-cultural backgrounds. The mean of 3.29 reflects a general observance to the multicultural education practices. Most notably, the respondents observed the most that their schools have ensured that all students have equitable opportunities to learn, regardless of the socio-cultural orientations. They also have the same observation that their schools provided all students with opportunities to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities that develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase academic achievement.

Table 2
Level of Observance to Multicultural Education Practices

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. The school helps the students understand the complex characteristics of ethnic groups within society.	3.31	Observed	10
2. The school ensured that all students have equitable opportunities to learn.	3.46	Observed	1
3. The curriculum helped students understand that knowledge is socially constructed.	3.42	Observed	3

4. The school provided all students with opportunities to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities that develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that increase academic achievement	3.45	Observed	2
5. The school ensured that students learn about stereotyping.	3.11	Observed	18
6. The school made efforts for students to learn about the values shared by virtually all cultural groups	3.39	Observed	4
7. The teachers helped students acquire the social skills needed to interact effectively with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups.	3.32	Observed	8.5
8. The school provides opportunities for students from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups to interact socially.	3.15	Observed	17
9. A school involves the students in decision-making.	3.22	Observed	15
10. The teachers use multiple culturally sensitive techniques to assess complex cognitive and social skills.	3.24	Observed	13.5
11. Teachers understand the ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and social class interact to influence student behavior.	3.36	Observed	6
12. The school ensures that all students have equitable opportunities to meet high standards.	3.32	Observed	8.5
13. The curriculum helped students understand that knowledge reflects researchers' personal experiences as well as the social, political, and economic contexts in which they live and work.	3.35	Observed	7
14. The school provided all students with opportunities to participate in extra- and co-curricular activities that foster positive interracial relationships.	3.18	Observed	15
15. The school ensures that students learn about related biases that have negative effects on racial and ethnic relations.	3.38	Observed	5
16. The schools made efforts for students to learn about justice, equality, freedom, peace, compassion, and charity.	3.27	Observed	11.5
17. The teachers provide classroom activities for students to interact with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups.	3.09	Observed	19
18. The school designed programs to lessen fear and anxiety among students from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups.	3.27	Observed	11.5
19. A school has organizational strategies to ensure that members of the school community learn collaborative skills and dispositions in order to create a caring environment for students.	3.24	Observed	13.5
Over-all Assessment	**3.29**	**Observed**	

Legend: 3.50-4.00 (4) Highly Observed, 2.50-3.49 (3) Observed, 1.50-2.49 (2) Rarely Observed, 1.00-1.49 (1) Not Observed at All
n=349, SD= 0.58

The curriculum also helped students understand that knowledge is socially constructed, where there is inclusion in the generation of knowledge among diverse learners. However, they reported as least observed when the teachers provide classroom activities for students to interact with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups. Furthermore, there is a need to include the issue of stereotyping in the teaching and learning process and to provide more opportunities for students to interact socially with others through eliminating the language barriers.

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3. **Southeast Asian Teaching Competency Level**

The results in table 3 suggest that the pre-service teachers in the region are prepared for the ASEAN educational landscape. The mean of 2.88 reflects a high level of general competency with regards to the Southeast Asian Competency skills required for teachers. Their main strengths are their holistic skills of being kind and compassionate, nurturing relationships with care and respects, accepting individual differences, and practicing inclusion and respect inside the classroom. These are essential skills for the Southeast Asian Teacher for the ASEAN educational landscape. However, they may need to focus improvement on mastering their content and using research-based knowledge in their instruction.

Table 3
Competency Level Based on SEA-TCF

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
1. Master my subject content	2.57	High	31
2. Use research-based knowledge	2.59	High	30
3. Update myself on new educational trends	2.80	High	21
4. Study educational policies and how they affect my teaching	2.73	High	25
5. Understand how to implement the curriculum	2.68	High	28.5
6. Check new changes in an education environment	2.79	High	22
7. Identify my students' needs and strengths to help them learn better	2.95	High	13
8. Understand how my students learn	2.91	High	14
9. Value what makes my students unique	2.96	High	12
10. Select appropriate teaching and learning strategy	2.87	High	16
11. Design clear and effective lessons my students can understand	2.82	High	18.5
12. Create a positive and caring learning space	2.90	High	15
13. Design assessment process and tools	2.72	High	26.5
14. Monitor my students' progress and provide appropriate support	2.82	High	18.5
15. Use results from assessment to improve instruction	2.74	High	24
16. Build a support network	2.68	High	28.5
17. Create a welcoming space	2.81	High	20
18. Sustain the partnership	2.84	High	17
19. Engage parents and caregivers to be partners in learning	2.72	High	26.5
20. Design learning activities using community conditions, local wisdom, tradition, and knowledge	2.76	High	23
21. Accept what makes people different	3.09	High	4.5
22. Practice inclusion and respect in the classroom	3.09	High	4.5
23. Continue to grow by knowing myself more	3.09	High	4.5
24. Become more aware and responsible for my emotions and health	3.04	High	7
25. Nurture my relationships with care and respect	3.12	High	2
26. Be kind and compassionate	3.22	High	1
27. Inspire my students and colleagues by setting my best example	3.00	High	8
28. Nurture my students' confidence in what they can do and become	2.98	High	11
29. Keep alive my passion for teaching	2.99	High	9.5
30. Take responsibility in my own personal and professional growth	3.09	High	4.5
31. Inspire other teachers by setting my best example	2.99	High	9.5
Over-all Assessment	**2.88**	**High**	

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Legend: 3.50-4.00 (4) Very High, 2.50-3.49 (3) High, 1.50-2.49 (2) Low, 1.00-1.49 (1) Very Low
n=349, SD= 0.58

4. Variance in the Level of Observance of Multicultural Education Practices

Findings, presented in table 4, indicate that there are significant differences in the level of observance of multicultural education when the respondents are classified according to the QA level of their programs. The computed p-value of .000 is lesser than the .05 level of significance; hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4
Homogenous Subsets in Level of Observance to Multicultural Education Practices

QA level	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
	1	**2**	**3**
None	2.725000		
Candidate Status	2.784671		
Level 1	3.086376	3.086376	
Level 2		3.477446	3.477446
Level 3			3.572897
Level 4			3.816291
Sig.	.173	.108	.237

a. SD =.58, Test used= ANOVA One-way, $F(5,25.342)$, p=.000
b. Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 29.267.

Further analysis through Scheffe reveals that there are three homogenous groups based on their level of observance of multicultural education practices. It can be deduced that those respondents whose programs are in levels 3 and 4 of quality assurance have significantly higher levels of observance to multicultural education practices whereas those respondents whose programs have not yet undergone external quality assurance measures and are only in the Candidate status have significantly lower levels of observance of multicultural education practices. The results imply that attaining higher levels of quality assurance assures higher educational institutions to be more inclusive to multicultural ASEAN learners. Thus, sustained quality assurance future-proofs the higher education institutions to the ASEAN common space.

5. Variance in the Competency Level vis-à-vis SEA-TCF

Table 5 data indicate that there are significant differences in the Southeast Asian teacher competency levels when the respondents are classified according to the QA level of their programs. The computed p-value of .000 is lesser than the .05 level of significance, hence, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 5
Homogenous Subsets in Level of Competence vis-à-vis SEA-TCF

QA level	Subset for alpha = 0.05			
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
None	2.154685			
Candidate Status	2.371166	2.371166		
Level 1		2.785253	2.785253	
Level 2			2.918476	2.918476
Level 3				3.361994
Level 4				3.364068
Sig.	.757	.090	.963	.051

a. SD=.59, test used= ANOVA One-way, $F(5, 27.587)$, p= .000
b. Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed, Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 27.476.

Further analysis through Scheffe reveals that there are four homogenous groups based on their level of competence with regard to the Southeast Asian standards. It can be deduced that those respondents whose programs are in levels 3 and 4 of quality assurance have significantly betterSoutheast Asian teacher competency levels compared

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to those respondents whose programs have not yet undergone external quality assurance measures and are only in the Candidate status. The results point out that through higher levels of quality assurance, higher education institutions develop teachers who possess the essential skills of a Southeast Asian teacher, thereby enabling them to participate and co-exist in an ASEAN higher education common space.

6. Impact of Quality Assurance on Internationalization of Education

Table 6

Regression Model Summary for Level Observance of Multicultural Education Practices

R	Square	d R Square	rror of the timate	Change Statistics				
				re Change	ange	1	2	F Change
.503ª	.253	.251	.4992226	.253	116.690	1	344	.000

s: (Constant), QA level
nt Variable: observance of multicultural education
alue)= .000

The data presented in table 6 suggests that the level of quality assurance significantly impacts the level of observance of multicultural education practices of higher education institutions. Furthermore, it reveals that there is 25% improvement in the level of multicultural education practices among schools through sustained higher levels of quality assurance. It can therefore be said that a better multicultural education-ready institution can be predicted by its level of quality assurance.

Table 7

Regression Model Summary for Competency Level of Teachers

R	uare	d R Square	rror of the timate	Change Statistics				
				re Change	ange	1	2	F Change
.527ª	.277	.275	.4984155	.277	127.382	1	332	.000

s: (Constant), QA level
nt Variable: self-rating on competency checklist
alue)= .000

The data presented in table 6.2 suggests that the level of quality assurance positively impacts the Southeast Asian competency levels of teachers of higher education institutions. Furthermore, it reveals that there is 27.8 % improvement in competency levels for Southeast Asian teachers among schools through sustained higher levels of quality assurance. It can therefore be said that a more competent teacher of Southeast Asia can be predicted by its level of quality assurance.

Conclusions

1. The HEIs of CALABARZON have continuously improved the quality of their teacher education programs through strengthened QA systems. They have the QA roadmap to enable the inclusion of international students and collaboration in the international educational landscape.
2. The HEIs in the region have internationally-inclusive education to accommodate the socio-culturally diverse learners of the ASEAN community.
3. The pre-service teachers in CALABARZON have the competence to cater to learners of the ASEAN educational landscape.
4. The HEIs in CALABARZON with stronger QA mechanisms have more internationally-inclusive education to accommodate the socio-culturally diverse learners of the AEC.
5. Through sustained quality assurance initiatives, HEIs develop teachers with the essential skills for the AEC; thus, future-proofing the teachers for the international educational landscape.
6. Better multicultural education-ready institutions and more competent Southeast Asian teachers can be predicted by its level of quality assurance.

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Recommendations

1. Encourage the HEIs to push for higher levels of accreditation of their teacher education programs to enable participation in the international educational landscape.
2. The teachers may provide more classroom activities for students to interact with students from other racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups. Include the issue of stereotyping in the teaching and learning process and provide more opportunities for students to interact socially with others through eliminating the language barriers.
3. Focus continuous improvement of teachers towards mastery of content and use of research-based knowledge in their instruction.
4. HEIs that have not yet committed themselves to continuous quality improvement may institute QA mechanisms.
5. Integrate faculty training needs assessment based on multicultural education practices in QA programs of HEIs.
6. Develop blueprints that align QA standards with the SEA-TCF.
7. Pursue further studies covering other variables that may contribute to enable internationalization of HEIs.

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