Enhancing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) Survey Questionnaire: A Phase-Based Approach

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Abstract

Aim: The research aimed to enhance the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process by developing an improved survey questionnaire that comprehensively addresses the key factors influencing the recognition of qualifications across borders, particularly on educational standards, accreditation and licensure processes, professional practice regulations, continuing professional development (CPD), and ethical standards. Additionally, the questionnaire introduced a focus on collaboration within the ASEAN region.

Methodology: A qualitative method was employed, involving content analysis and expert interviews to identify gaps in the original MRPQ questionnaire and to develop a more robust version. The improved questionnaire was then analyzed and compared with the original to assess its effectiveness.

Results: The findings revealed that the improved questionnaire provided a broader scope, addressing previously neglected areas such as ethical standards, compensation, and collaboration. It offered a more detailed exploration of continuing professional development and professional practice regulations, making it a more comprehensive tool for understanding and facilitating the MRPQ process. The inclusion of questions related to ethical standards and collaboration emphasized the importance of consistent professional behavior and cross-border cooperation.

Conclusion: The conclusions drawn from the study suggest that the improved MRPQ questionnaire is superior to the original version due to its comprehensive coverage of essential factors. This enhanced tool provides a more holistic approach to assessing and recognizing professional qualifications across different countries and professions. Based on the findings, the study recommends adopting the improved questionnaire as the standard tool for MRPQ assessments, harmonizing educational standards and accreditation processes, strengthening collaboration among countries, addressing compensation disparities, and increasing accessibility to CPD opportunities. Regular reviews of the questionnaire are also recommended to ensure its continued relevance.

Keywords: Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications, Educational Standards, Accreditation, Ethical Standards, Professional Mobility, Survey Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, the need for mutual recognition of professional qualifications (MRPQ) has become essential for facilitating professional mobility, fostering international collaboration, and maintaining high standards of practice across borders. The MRPQ framework allows professionals to have their qualifications recognized in different countries, enabling them to practice their profession with minimal barriers (Braun et al., 2020; Cueto, 2022b). This is particularly relevant within the ASEAN region, where diverse regulatory environments and educational systems present unique challenges in achieving alignment across member states (Surono & Ariyanto, 2024). Establishing common benchmarks that ensure both quality and equity in professional recognition is crucial to the success of the MRPQ process (Hamanaka & Jusoh, 2018; Cueto, 2023).

The MRPQ framework is applied across various professions, from healthcare to engineering, accounting, and education, each with its own set of complexities and requirements. The effectiveness of MRPQs hinges on a comprehensive understanding of the key factors that influence professional recognition, such as education, accreditation, licensure, professional development, and ethics (Moreno, 2024; Carvajal, et al, 2023). These components must be meticulously evaluated to identify areas of alignment and divergence, which are critical for advancing the MRPQ process across different sectors.

This research enhances the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) Survey Questionnaire through a Phase-Based Approach and aims to develop an adaptable survey tool that gathers data on these critical factors across a range of professions. By anchoring the survey on five key frames—Education, Accreditation and Licensure, Professional Practice, Professional Development, and Professional Ethics—this research seeks to provide a detailed understanding of how different countries within the ASEAN region regulate and practice various professions. The phase-based approach will allow for the identification of commonalities and discrepancies in professional qualifications, facilitating a more informed and strategic advancement of the MRPQ process (Carvajal, et al, 2023).

The importance of MRPQs has gained prominence in the context of regional integration, particularly within ASEAN, where the mobility of professionals across borders is seen as a vital contributor to economic growth and social development (Chao, 2017). MRPQs not only enhance professional mobility but also contribute to the harmonization of educational and professional standards, fostering greater regional cooperation and integration (Law, et al 2019).

However, achieving mutual recognition is often challenged by the need to reconcile divergent regulatory frameworks and quality assurance mechanisms across different countries (Ziguras, & Barker, 2024).

This research addresses the need for a structured and evidence-based approach to assessing professional qualifications across various fields. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educational institutions, and professional bodies involved in the MRPQ process. Moreover, the survey tool developed through this research could serve as a model for other regions and professions seeking to achieve mutual recognition of qualifications.

Ultimately, this research aims to enhance the effectiveness of MRPQs by providing a systematic approach to identifying and addressing the challenges associated with professional recognition. Through the phase-based methodology, this study will contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve professional standards and ensure that qualified professionals can practice across borders with confidence and competence.

Background of the Study

The globalization of professional services has significantly increased the need for mechanisms that facilitate the recognition of professional qualifications across national borders. This demand has been particularly evident in regions such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), where economic integration and cross-border collaboration are key priorities (Chao, 2017). The Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) is one such mechanism designed to allow professionals trained in one country to have their qualifications recognized in another without the need to undergo additional education or training (Law, et al 2019).

Within ASEAN, the MRPQ process is integral to the region's broader goals of economic integration and labor market mobility. Professional mobility is not only essential for fostering economic growth but also for addressing skill shortages and ensuring that industries can access the talent they need, regardless of national boundaries (Braun et al., 2020). However, the implementation of MRPQs is complex, involving the harmonization of educational standards, accreditation processes, licensure requirements, professional development opportunities, and ethical standards across diverse legal and regulatory frameworks (Surono & Ariyanto, 2024).

One of the critical challenges in the MRPQ process is the alignment of educational qualifications. Countries within ASEAN have varying standards for professional education, which can create significant barriers to mutual recognition (Moreno, 2024). For instance, while one country may require a certain number of years of study or

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specific curricular content for professional qualification, another may have different requirements. These discrepancies can hinder the mobility of professionals and limit the effectiveness of the MRPQ framework (Carvajal, et al, 2023).

Accreditation and licensure are also key areas where alignment is necessary. The processes by which professionals are certified and allowed to practice vary widely across countries, creating challenges in ensuring that qualifications are mutually recognized (Hamanaka & Jusoh, 2018). Some countries may require rigorous examinations, while others may rely on different forms of competency assessments. Moreover, the criteria for licensure renewal and the role of continuing professional development (CPD) in maintaining professional status are also not standardized across the region, further complicating the MRPQ process (Ziguras, & Barker, 2024).

Professional practice and ethics are other areas where differences between countries can create obstacles to mutual recognition. The scope of practice for professionals, the responsibilities they are allowed to undertake, and the ethical guidelines they must follow can vary significantly. These variations can lead to difficulties in ensuring that professionals are qualified to meet the demands of their profession when practicing in a different country (Law, et al 2019).

Identification of the Research Gap

While the importance of MRPQs in fostering professional mobility and economic integration within ASEAN is well recognized, there remains a significant research gap in understanding how to effectively implement these frameworks across different professions. This study aims to address these gaps by developing a comprehensive survey tool that gathers data on the key factors influencing the MRPQ process across different professions. By focusing on the five frames—Education, Accreditation and Licensure, Professional Practice, Professional Development, and Professional Ethics—this research will provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with MRPQs. The findings from this study are expected to contribute to the ongoing efforts to harmonize professional qualifications within ASEAN and to inform the development of more effective MRPQ frameworks.

Significance of the Research

1. Policy Development
One of the primary contributions of this research is to provide policymakers with comprehensive data and insights necessary for refining and implementing MRPQs. The phase-based survey tool developed in this study will serve as a valuable resource for identifying areas of alignment and misalignment in professional qualifications across various fields. By offering a structured approach to data collection, this research can inform evidence-based policies that promote the harmonization of qualifications and standards across ASEAN member states. The findings can also guide the creation of new regulations or amendments to existing ones, helping to overcome legal and regulatory barriers that currently hinder the MRPQ process (Braun et al., 2020; Carvajal, 2023a).

2. Professional Mobility
The research is particularly significant for enhancing professional mobility within the ASEAN region. With a well-implemented MRPQ framework, professionals in various fields, such as healthcare, engineering, education, and accounting, can move more freely between countries. This mobility is essential for addressing skills shortages, fostering knowledge exchange, and ensuring that the region's economies can adapt to changing demands (Law, et al 2019). By identifying the key factors that influence the mutual recognition of qualifications, this research can help reduce the barriers to professional mobility, thereby enabling more seamless cross-border practice and collaboration.

3. Economic Integration
The MRPQ process is closely tied to the broader goals of economic integration within ASEAN. The ability of professionals to work across borders without having to requalify or undergo extensive additional training is crucial for the region's economic competitiveness (Chao, 2017). This research contributes to this goal by providing insights that can streamline the MRPQ process, thereby supporting the free flow of skilled labor across the region. Enhanced professional mobility can lead to more efficient allocation of human resources, improved service delivery, and increased economic productivity.

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4. Contribution to Professional Development and Ethics

The research also holds significance for the ongoing professional development and ethical practice of professionals across the region. By examining the role of continuing professional development (CPD) and ethical standards in the MRPQ process, this study can provide recommendations for harmonizing these aspects across different countries (Ziguras, & Barker, 2024). This will not only support the professional growth of individuals but also ensure that professionals adhere to consistent ethical standards, regardless of where they practice. This consistency is vital for maintaining public trust and ensuring the quality of services provided across borders.

5. Broader Regional and Global Implications

While the focus of this research is on ASEAN, its findings and methodologies have broader implications for other regions seeking to implement MRPQs. The challenges and opportunities identified in this study can serve as lessons for other regional blocs, such as the European Union, the African Union, and the Gulf Cooperation Council, which are also working towards greater professional integration. Additionally, international organizations and global professional bodies can use the insights from this research to advocate for more effective and inclusive MRPQ frameworks worldwide.

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.

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. Survey Questionnaire:

In the context of enhancing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ), the survey questionnaire serves as a critical instrument for gathering detailed information on the key factors influencing professional qualifications across different countries and professions. The responses collected through survey questionnaires can then be analyzed to draw insights, identify trends, and make informed recommendations.

Literature Review

Understanding MRPQ and the Steps

Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) 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 as their qualifications are recognized in another country. It is usually established through bilateral or multilateral agreements between countries.

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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. Intervention measures: In some cases, if there are substantial differences between the qualifications of the applicant and the receiving country's standards, intervention 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.

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
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 (Papademetriou, et al, 2016).

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.

The MRPQ of PRC: The Five-Phase Approach to MRPQ by the Professional Regulation Commission

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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, 2024), is a comprehensive framework that goes beyond the existing Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs) within 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:

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.
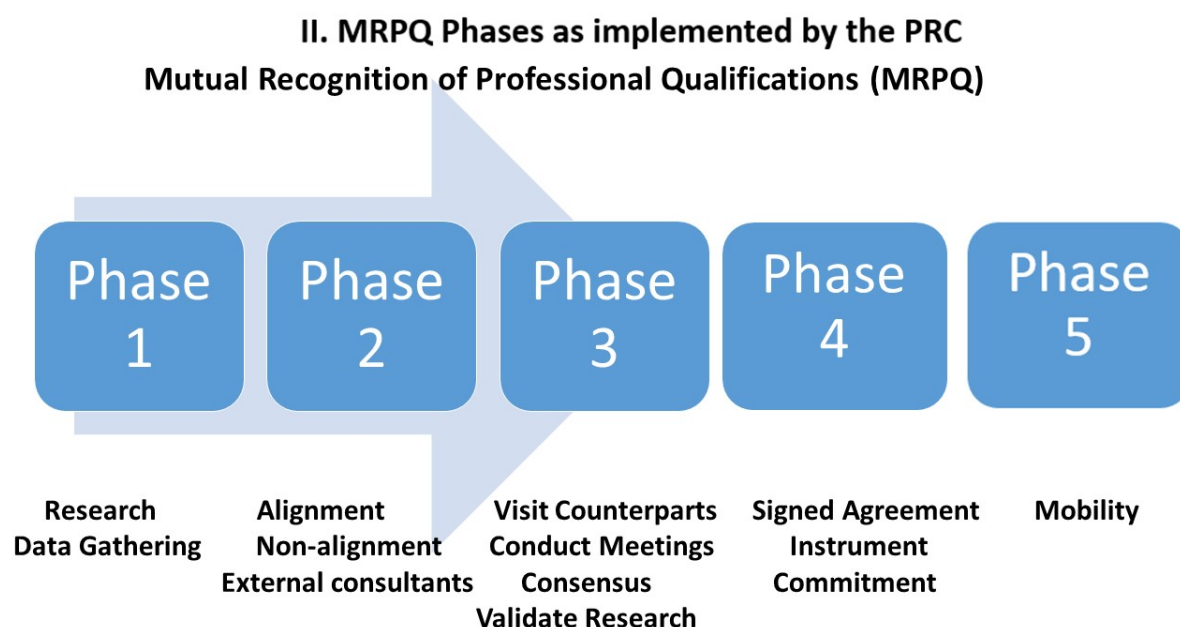5. Phase 5 : Mobility.

II. MRPQ Phases as implemented by the PRC
Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ)

Figure 1.
MRPQ Phhases as implemented by the PRC on
Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (Cueto, 2022, 2022, 2023, 2024)

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.

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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 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, 2023,2024), 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.

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:

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1. Compared to MRA, it is a Bottom-Up Approach.
2. Alternative initiative
3. More lenient and flexible;e.
4. Builds up confidence in each other.
5. Establish working relatuonships
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.
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.

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Features of Establishment of MRAs: Top Down Approach

Government to government
Signed documents
Coordinating Committees
Exchange of information
Recognition of qualifications
Mechanisms of mobility

Governments agree to establish MRAs
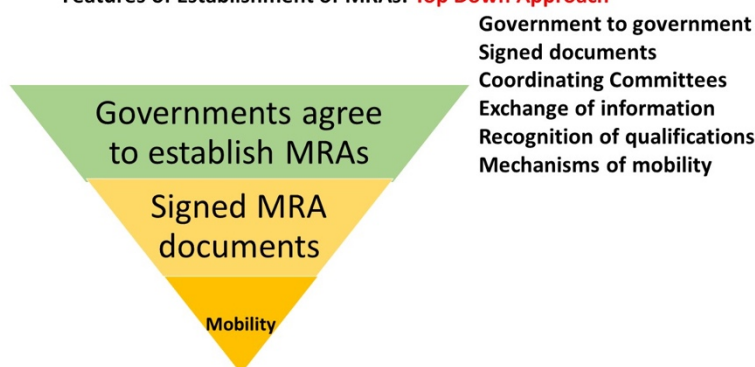
Signed MRA documents

Mobility

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

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).

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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.

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.

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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.

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 as cited in Carvajal, et al (2023b):

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.
3.	Comparative Analysis: Conduct a comparative analysis of professional standards, competencies, and qualifications between the Philippines and target ASEAN countries.
4.	Targeted not Harmonization, But Substantial Equivalence: Identify specific areas where substantial equivalence 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.

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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.

Research Objectives

The objective of this research is to improve the survey questionnaire to effectively capture comprehensive data on educational standards, accreditation and licensure processes, professional practice regulations, continuing professional development (CPD), and ethical standards across ASEAN countries, ensuring that it accurately reflects the key factors influencing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative approach, specifically through content analysis and expert interviews, to improve the survey questionnaire.

1. **Content Analysis:**
   a) Data Analysis: The research begins with a content analysis of the original Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) questionnaire. This analysis focuses on identifying strengths and weaknesses in the existing items, particularly in terms of clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. The coding process involves examining each item to determine its effectiveness in capturing the necessary data related to education, accreditation, licensure, professional practice, professional development, and professional ethics within the ASEAN region.
   b) Outcome: The findings from this analysis highlight specific areas where the questionnaire can be enhanced. These insights serve as the foundation for revising and improving the questionnaire, ensuring it more effectively addresses the research objectives and accurately captures data relevant to the MRPQ process.
2. **Expert Consultations:**
   a) Participants: Following the content analysis, the research involves consulting with education experts. These experts include policymakers, academic leaders, professional regulators, and practitioners experienced in the MRPQ process.
   b) Purpose: The purpose of these iconsultations is to gather additional insights and recommendations on refining and improving the revised survey questionnaire. The experts provide feedback on the revised items, offering suggestions for further refinement and identifying any additional areas that need to be covered.

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RESULTS and DISCUSSION

1. Analysis of the Original Questionnaire

This analysis carefully examines the components of the Original Questionnaire to evaluate how each section aligns with the survey's overall objectives. The structure is systematically organized into six key areas, each addressing different aspects of professional qualifications within the ASEAN region. Below is a detailed analysis of each section.

a. Purpose of the Survey

The purpose statement effectively establishes the context for the questionnaire by clearly communicating that the data collected will support the potential formulation of a Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) or Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) within the ASEAN region. This clarity is essential for engaging respondents and ensuring accurate and meaningful responses. To enhance the statement, it would be beneficial to explicitly mention that the survey aims to identify both commonalities and differences in the regulation and practice of various professions across ASEAN countries. This addition would provide a more comprehensive foundation for the development of MRPQs or MRAs, making the objectives of the survey clearer to respondents.

2. Basic Respondent Information

This section collects basic demographic information, including the respondent's country, name, affiliation, position, and contact details. It serves as a foundational tool for organizing data by country and respondent type. To enhance this section, it may be helpful to include a brief statement ensuring the confidentiality of responses, which could encourage more honest and detailed answers. Additionally, providing an option for respondents to specify their role within their profession (e.g., practitioner, regulator, educator) would offer deeper insights into their perspectives and allow for more nuanced data analysis.

3. Regulation of the Profession

This section collects information on the regulation of various professions across different countries, including whether the profession is regulated, the responsible regulatory bodies, the legal framework governing the profession, and the number of practitioners. It also addresses whether foreign professionals are allowed to practice in the country and under what specific conditions. The section is comprehensive, covering multiple aspects of professional regulation, which provides a well-rounded understanding of the regulatory environment. However, there are areas for improvement. For example, question c could be rephrased to clearly address the scope of practice, such as asking, "If the profession is not legally recognized in your country, which other professions or practitioners are responsible for providing related services?" Additionally, the term "foreigners" in question e could be clarified by specifying "foreign professionals" to avoid ambiguity and ensure the question accurately captures the intended information.

4. Registration and Licensing System

This section explores the educational and licensing requirements for practicing a profession, including the necessary degree, the presence of licensure exams, and any classification levels within the profession. It effectively captures a range of important information, such as academic prerequisites, examination procedures, and professional classifications. However, some questions could benefit from further clarification. For instance, question f could ask for specific examples of classification levels within the national qualifications framework. Additionally, question e, which inquires about alternative certification mechanisms if there is no licensure exam, could be enhanced by asking respondents to provide examples of other countries that use similar mechanisms as a follow-up, offering a broader context for comparison.

5. Existence of Professional Organizations

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This section seeks information on whether professional organizations exist in the respondent's country and their roles in regulating the profession. It is well-structured, effectively linking the presence of professional organizations to their potential regulatory functions. However, there is room for improvement. For instance, question c could be expanded to inquire about the involvement of these professional organizations in continuing professional development (CPD) and policy advocacy. This addition would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the organizations' contributions beyond regulation.

6. Education

This section focuses on the educational infrastructure supporting various professions, including the number of institutions offering degrees, the duration of programs, and the availability of advanced degrees or specializations. The questions are comprehensive, covering both basic and advanced educational structures. However, there is potential for enhancement. For example, in question f, when inquiring about specialization areas, it could be beneficial to also ask how these specializations align with the needs of the country's broader system, providing additional context for the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process.

7. Renewal of Professional ID/License

This section covers the process and requirements for renewing professional licenses, including the validity period and the necessity of continuing education. It effectively captures crucial information about the professional lifecycle and ongoing competency requirements. To enhance this section, it could be helpful to inquire about how frequently continuing education requirements change and what mechanisms are in place to ensure they remain relevant. This would provide a deeper understanding of how professionals maintain their qualifications over time.

8. Intention for Partnership and/or Collaboration for the Profession in Asia/ASEAN Region

This section focuses on collaboration and mobility within the ASEAN region, assessing interest in partnerships, information exchange, capacity building, and collaborative research. It effectively addresses the goals of the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process by exploring opportunities for collaboration. However, there are areas for improvement. For instance, question c could be expanded by asking respondents to specify the types of capacity-building programs or training they are interested in. Additionally, question d could be rephrased to focus on "Collaborative research efforts within the ASEAN region?" to provide clearer and more focused insights.

Overall, the questionnaire is well-structured and aligns with the goal of gathering comprehensive data to inform an MRPQ or MRA for Optometry in the ASEAN region. Minor improvements could be made to enhance clarity and gather more specific data, which would help ensure that the results are actionable and directly support the MRPQ/MRA development process.

Analysis of Questions /Items of the Original Questionnaire falling under educational standards, accreditation and licensure processes, professional practice regulations, continuing professional development (CPD), and ethical standards as key factors influencing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process

Table 1
Analysis of Questions /Items of the Original Questionnaire

	Question/Item	Category
1.	Is the profession regulated in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
2.	If yes, what is the name of the agency or body responsible for regulation?	Professional Practice Regulations
3.	Is it a government body/office?	Professional Practice Regulations
4.	If no, what body supervises the professionals?	Professional Practice Regulations

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5.	Is there a law creating the profession in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
6.	If yes, what is that law?	Professional Practice Regulations
7.	If the profession is not legally recognized, which group of professionals or occupation provides related services?	Professional Practice Regulations
8.	Approximate number of registered professionals in your country	Professional Practice Regulations
9.	Are foreigners allowed to practice in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
10.	If yes, what are the special requirements or procedures for foreign professionals?	Professional Practice Regulations
11.	What degree is required to practice the profession?	Educational Standards
12.	How many years are required to complete the degree?	Educational Standards
13.	Is passing a licensure examination or competency assessment required to practice?	Accreditation & Licensure
14.	Which body or organization administers the licensure examination?	Accreditation & Licensure
15.	What are the subjects/scope/areas covered in the licensure examination?	Accreditation & Licensure
16.	If there is no licensure exam, what other mechanisms are there for professional certification?	Accreditation & Licensure
17.	Any other requirements for registration and licensing?	Accreditation & Licensure
18.	Do you classify licensed or registered professionals into different levels?	Accreditation & Licensure
19.	If yes, what are the classification levels based on the national qualifications framework?	Accreditation & Licensure
20.	Is there an existing professional organization?	Professional Practice Regulations
21.	What is the name of the professional organization?	Professional Practice Regulations
22.	Do they assume any role in regulation?	Professional Practice Regulations
23.	How many members are there in the organization?	Professional Practice Regulations
24.	Is the organization recognized by the government?	Professional Practice Regulations
25.	Number of recognized higher education institutions (HEIs) offering degree programs	Educational Standards
26.	How many years are required to study and complete the degree?	Educational Standards
27.	Total number of students currently enrolled in all programs in your country	Educational Standards
28.	Is there a Masteral Program in your country?	Educational Standards
29.	Is there a PhD Program in your country?	Educational Standards
30.	Are there specialization areas in your curriculum?	Educational Standards
31.	If yes, what are the specialization areas?	Accreditation & Licensure
32.	How many years is the professional ID/license valid?	Accreditation & Licensure
33.	Are there any requirements to renew the professional ID/license?	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
34.	Are continuing professional development (CPD) seminars or courses required for renewal?	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
35.	Mobility of professionals within the ASEAN region	Collaboration (MRPQ)
36.	Exchange of information to promote best practices	Collaboration (MRPQ)
37.	Opportunities for capacity building and training	Collaboration (MRPQ)
38.	Fair distribution of resources through collaborative research	Collaboration (MRPQ)

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Table 1 presents the analysis of the questions and items in the original questionnaire, categorized under key factors influencing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process: Educational Standards, Accreditation and Licensure, Professional Practice Regulations, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and Collaboration. These categories serve as the pillars for understanding how professional qualifications are regulated, recognized, and developed across different countries within the ASEAN region.

Upon reviewing the table, it is evident that a significant portion of the questionnaire focuses on Professional Practice Regulations, with questions exploring the regulation of professions, the responsible agencies, legal frameworks, and the involvement of professional organizations. This emphasis reflects the importance of establishing a clear regulatory environment for the recognition of professional qualifications, as supported by (Surono & Ariyanto, 2024), who argue that strong regulatory frameworks are essential for the effective implementation of MRPQs.

Educational Standards are another critical category, with questions addressing the degree requirements, the duration of study programs, and the availability of advanced degrees such as Master's and PhD programs. These items highlight the need for alignment in educational qualifications across countries, a concern echoed by (Hamanaka & Jusoh, 2018), who points out that disparities in educational standards can hinder the mutual recognition of qualifications.

Accreditation and Licensure is thoroughly covered, with questions focusing on licensure exams, certification mechanisms, and classification levels within national qualification frameworks. The presence of these items underscores the complexity of achieving mutual recognition when accreditation and licensure processes vary significantly between countries, as discussed by Braun et al. (2020).

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is addressed through questions related to the renewal of professional licenses and the requirement of CPD seminars or courses. The inclusion of CPD in the questionnaire reflects the ongoing need for professionals to maintain and update their competencies, a key factor in ensuring quality and consistency across borders (Ziguras, & Barker, 2024).

Collaboration, particularly within the ASEAN region, is another focus area. Questions related to professional mobility, information exchange, capacity building, and resource distribution are crucial for fostering cross-border cooperation and integration. As Law, Te, & Hill (2019) note, collaboration is vital for achieving the goals of the MRPQ process and promoting professional mobility.

However, one notable omission in the original questionnaire is the lack of questions related to Ethical Standards. Ethical considerations are fundamental in ensuring that professionals adhere to consistent moral and professional principles, regardless of where they practice. The absence of this category in the questionnaire indicates a potential gap in addressing the full spectrum of factors influencing the MRPQ process. As Moreno (2024) emphasizes, aligning ethical standards is as important as aligning educational and regulatory frameworks, especially in professions that directly impact public welfare.

Summary of Identified Items Under Each Category

1. Educational Standards: The questionnaire addresses degree requirements, the duration of study programs, the number of recognized institutions, and the availability of advanced degrees and specialization areas.
2. Accreditation and Licensure: Questions focus on licensure exams, certification mechanisms, classification levels, and the validity and renewal of professional licenses.
3. Professional Practice Regulations: This category covers the regulation of professions, the role of government bodies, legal frameworks, and the involvement of professional organizations in regulation.
4. Continuing Professional Development (CPD): The questionnaire includes questions on the renewal of professional licenses and the requirement of CPD activities.
5. Collaboration (MRPQ): Items related to professional mobility, information exchange, capacity building, and resource distribution are included.

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In conclusion, while the original questionnaire is comprehensive in many areas, particularly in addressing educational standards, accreditation, licensure, and professional practice regulations, the absence of questions on ethical standards represents a significant gap. Future revisions of the questionnaire should consider including items that explore the ethical dimensions of professional practice, ensuring a more holistic approach to the MRPQ process.

Analysis of Questions /Items of the Improved Questionnaire falling under educational standards, accreditation and licensure processes, professional practice regulations, continuing professional development (CPD), and ethical standards as key factors influencing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process.

Table 2
Analysis of Questions /Items of the Improved Questionnaire

	Question/Item	Category
1.	What is the minimum educational qualification required to practice your profession in your country?	Educational Standards
2.	How many years of study are required to complete the educational qualification for this profession?	Educational Standards
3.	Are there recognized institutions in your country that offer this educational qualification?	Educational Standards
4.	Is there a standardized curriculum for this profession in your country?	Educational Standards
5.	Are there specialized areas of study within the educational program for this profession?	Educational Standards
6.	How does the educational curriculum align with the needs of the local/regional industry or system?	Educational Standards
7.	Is passing a licensure examination or competency assessment required to practice this profession?	Accreditation & Licensure
8.	Which organization or body administers the licensure examination?	Accreditation & Licensure
9.	What subjects or areas are covered in the licensure examination?	Accreditation & Licensure
10.	If there is no licensure examination, what other mechanisms are in place for professional certification?	Accreditation & Licensure
11.	Are there different levels of professional classification (e.g., junior, senior) based on qualifications or experience?	Accreditation & Licensure
12.	How long is the professional license/ID valid?	Accreditation & Licensure
13.	What are the requirements for renewing the professional license/ID?	Accreditation & Licensure
14.	Is the profession regulated in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
15.	If yes, what is the name of the regulatory agency or body responsible for overseeing this profession?	Professional Practice Regulations
16.	Is the regulatory agency a government body or a private organization?	Professional Practice Regulations
17.	Are there any specific laws or regulations that govern the practice of this profession?	Professional Practice Regulations
18.	Are foreign-trained professionals allowed to practice in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
19.	Is there an existing professional organization for this profession in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
20.	What is the average entry-level salary for this profession in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
21.	How does the compensation for this profession compare to other similar professions in your country?	Professional Practice Regulations

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22.	Are there any additional benefits (e.g., health insurance, retirement plans) commonly provided to professionals in this field?	Professional Practice Regulations
23.	Are there any significant disparities in compensation between different regions within your country?	Professional Practice Regulations
24.	Is continuing professional development (CPD) required for license renewal?	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
25.	What types of CPD activities are recognized for maintaining or renewing the license?	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
26.	How many CPD units or hours are required annually for license renewal?	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
27.	Who provides CPD programs in your country (e.g., professional organizations, educational institutions)?	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
28.	What are the challenges faced by professionals in meeting CPD requirements?	Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
29.	Is there a standardized code of ethics for this profession in your country?	Ethical Standards
30.	Is ethical training included in the professional curriculum or as part of CPD?	Ethical Standards
31.	What mechanisms are in place for addressing ethical violations within the profession?	Ethical Standards
32.	How does the profession address issues of cultural sensitivity and diversity in practice?	Ethical Standards
33.	Mobility of Professionals	Collaboration
34.	Exchange of information to promote the adoption of best practices on standards and qualifications	Collaboration
35.	Opportunities for capacity building and training	Collaboration
36.	Collaborative research	Collaboration

Table 2 presents a comprehensive breakdown of the questions and items included in the improved questionnaire, categorized under key factors influencing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process. The categories include Educational Standards, Accreditation and Licensure Processes, Professional Practice Regulations, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), Ethical Standards, and Collaboration. This structured approach ensures that the questionnaire captures a wide range of factors essential to understanding and facilitating the MRPQ process across different professions and countries.

The inclusion of Educational Standards as a category highlights the importance of consistency in educational requirements across different countries. Questions addressing the minimum educational qualifications, years of study, and the existence of recognized institutions provide valuable insights into the foundational requirements for entering a profession. According to (Surono & Ariyanto, 2024), aligning educational standards is crucial for ensuring that professionals trained in different countries possess comparable levels of knowledge and skills.

The Accreditation and Licensure category focuses on the processes involved in certifying and authorizing professionals to practice. This includes questions on licensure examinations, certification mechanisms, and professional classifications. The emphasis on these items is supported by Braun et al. (2020), who emphasize the need for standardized accreditation and licensure processes to facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications. Ensuring that professionals meet consistent standards before entering the workforce is essential for maintaining public trust and ensuring quality across borders.

Professional Practice Regulations cover a wide range of topics, from the regulation of the profession to compensation and benefits. This category ensures that the questionnaire addresses not only the legal and regulatory frameworks governing professional practice but also the economic factors that influence professional mobility. The inclusion of questions related to compensation and disparities in different regions acknowledges the role of economic incentives in professional mobility, as discussed by Law, Te, & Hill (2019).   Understanding these factors can help policymakers address potential barriers to the mutual recognition of qualifications.

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The category of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) underscores the importance of lifelong learning in maintaining professional competence. Questions related to CPD requirements, the types of activities recognized, and the challenges faced by professionals in meeting these requirements reflect the need for ongoing education and training. Carvajal and Vicente (2024) argue that CPD is critical for ensuring that professionals remain current with developments in their field, and its inclusion in the MRPQ process helps ensure that qualifications remain relevant over time.

Ethical Standards are also a key focus in the improved questionnaire. By including questions on codes of ethics, ethical training, and mechanisms for addressing ethical violations, the questionnaire recognizes the importance of maintaining consistent ethical standards across borders. This is particularly important in professions that have a direct impact on public welfare, as emphasized by (Moreno, 2024).

Finally, the addition of the Collaboration category in the improved questionnaire addresses the need for cross-border cooperation in areas such as professional mobility, information exchange, capacity building, and research. Collaboration is vital for achieving the goals of the MRPQ process, as it promotes the sharing of best practices and helps ensure that professional standards are aligned across countries (Chao, 2017).

When comparing the original and improved questionnaires, it is clear that the improved version offers a more comprehensive and structured approach to capturing the factors that influence the MRPQ process. The original questionnaire focused primarily on regulatory and educational aspects, while the improved version expands to include ethical standards, compensation, and collaboration. This broader scope ensures that the improved questionnaire provides a more holistic understanding of the factors that impact the recognition of professional qualifications across borders.

Validation and Reliability Test of the Research Instrument - Improved Questionnaire

1. **Validation: Face Content Validation by Experts**

To ensure the validity of the improved MRPQ questionnaire, a face content validation was conducted by a panel of five experts with deep expertise in education, accreditation, professional practice regulations, continuing professional development (CPD), and ethical standards. The experts were tasked with evaluating the questionnaire for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

Steps in Face Content Validation:
a) Selection of Experts: The panel consisted of experts in the fields relevant to the MRPQ process, including representatives from academia, regulatory bodies, professional organizations, and Research and Statistics Division of the Professional Regulation Commission.
b) Review Process: The experts individually reviewed the questionnaire and provided feedback on each section—Educational Standards, Accreditation and Licensure Processes, Professional Practice Regulations, CPD, Ethical Standards, and Collaboration. They assessed whether the questions effectively captured the necessary information for the MRPQ process.
c) Feedback and Revisions: Feedback from the experts led to revisions, such as rephrasing certain questions for clarity and ensuring that all relevant aspects of professional qualifications were adequately covered.

The result of the face content validation indicated that the improved questionnaire was comprehensive and aligned with the research goals. The experts unanimously agreed that the questionnaire was appropriate for capturing the necessary data for the MRPQ process.

2. **Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha Test**

To measure the reliability of the improved questionnaire, a Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted. This statistical test assesses the internal consistency of the questionnaire, indicating how well the items within each

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section are correlated. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable for indicating good internal consistency.

The Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each section separately to assess internal consistency using SPSS and the results are as follows:

a) Educational Standards: 0.82
b) Accreditation & Licensure: 0.85
c) Professional Practice Regulations: 0.80
d) Compensation: 0.75
e) Continuing Professional Development (CPD): 0.78
f) Ethical Standards: 0.77
g) Collaboration: 0.79

Each section's Cronbach's Alpha value exceeds the generally accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency across all sections of the improved questionnaire. This demonstrates that the items within each section are reliably measuring the same underlying construct. The improved MRPQ questionnaire passed both the face content validation by experts and the reliability test through Cronbach's Alpha. The face validation ensured that the content was relevant, clear, and comprehensive, while the Cronbach's Alpha test confirmed that the items within each section of the questionnaire were internally consistent and reliable. With these validations, the improved questionnaire is both a valid and reliable tool for assessing the key factors influencing the MRPQ process across different countries and professions.

Conclusion

The improved Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) questionnaire is demonstrably more comprehensive and effective than the original version. This conclusion is supported by several key findings:

1. The improved questionnaire expands its scope to cover essential areas that were not adequately addressed in the original version. In addition to the original focus on educational standards, accreditation, and licensure processes, the improved questionnaire now includes critical factors such as ethical standards, compensation, and research collaboration. By capturing a wider range of elements that influence professional qualifications, the improved questionnaire provides a more holistic view of the MRPQ process. This broader scope ensures that all relevant factors affecting the recognition of qualifications are considered, making it a more effective tool for policymakers and stakeholders.

2. One significant improvement in the revised questionnaire is the inclusion of questions related to ethical standards. The original questionnaire lacked this important dimension, which is crucial for ensuring consistent professional behavior and maintaining public trust across borders. By addressing ethical training, codes of ethics, and mechanisms for handling ethical violations, the improved questionnaire recognizes the importance of ethics in the professional landscape. This addition strengthens the questionnaire's ability to assess whether professionals meet the necessary moral and professional standards, which is vital for the successful implementation of MRPQ frameworks.

4. The improved questionnaire offers a more detailed exploration of CPD, including the types of activities recognized, the challenges professionals face in meeting CPD requirements, and the organizations that provide CPD programs. This level of detail was not present in the original questionnaire, which limited its ability to assess how professionals maintain and enhance their qualifications over time. By providing a more thorough examination of CPD, the improved questionnaire ensures that ongoing professional development is given the attention it deserves, thereby supporting the long-term effectiveness of MRPQ frameworks.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations can be made to further enhance the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process. These recommendations are aimed at addressing the gaps identified in the original questionnaire and leveraging the improvements made in the revised version to create a more effective and comprehensive framework for recognizing professional qualifications across borders.

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1.	Adopt the Improved Questionnaire as the Standard Tool for MRPQ Assessments: The improved questionnaire should be adopted as the standard tool for assessing and facilitating the MRPQ process. Its comprehensive coverage of essential factors—such as educational standards, accreditation and licensure processes, ethical standards, compensation, and collaboration—makes it a more effective instrument for gathering the necessary data to inform policy decisions and enhance professional mobility.

2.	Strengthen the Focus on Ethical Standards: Given the importance of ethical considerations in professional practice, it is recommended that ethical standards be integrated more deeply into the MRPQ process. This can be achieved by ensuring that all professions covered by MRPQ frameworks have standardized codes of ethics and mechanisms for addressing ethical violations. Additionally, ethical training should be a mandatory component of both educational curricula and continuing professional development (CPD) programs.

3.	Harmonize Educational Standards and Accreditation Processes Across Countries: The study highlights the need for greater alignment of educational standards and accreditation processes across different countries. To facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications, it is recommended that regional and international bodies work together to develop standardized guidelines for educational programs and licensure exams. This harmonization will help ensure that professionals trained in different countries possess comparable levels of knowledge and skills.

4.	Enhance Collaboration Between Countries: Collaboration is a critical component of the MRPQ process, as it fosters the exchange of best practices and supports the continuous improvement of professional standards. It is recommended that countries within the ASEAN region, and other regions working on MRPQ frameworks, prioritize collaboration through joint research initiatives, capacity-building programs, and regular information exchanges. Strengthening these collaborative efforts will help ensure that MRPQ frameworks are effectively implemented and adapted to changing needs.

5.	Regularly Review and Update the MRPQ Questionnaire: Finally, it is recommended that the MRPQ questionnaire be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in professional practice, educational standards, and regulatory requirements. By keeping the questionnaire current, policymakers and stakeholders can ensure that it remains a relevant and effective tool for assessing the factors that influence the recognition of professional qualifications. This ongoing review process should involve input from a wide range of stakeholders, including professional organizations, educational institutions, and regulatory bodies.

Disclaimer:

The findings and conclusions presented in this research study are the authors' 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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MRPQ Survey Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

We are conducting a survey to gather valuable insights into the critical factors influencing the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) process. This survey is designed to explore five key areas: Educational Standards, Accreditation and Licensure Processes, Professional Practice Regulations, Continuing Professional Development (CPD), and Ethical Standards. Additionally, questions related to collaboration will be included to offer a comprehensive understanding of the elements that impact the recognition of professional qualifications across borders.

Your participation is vital, as the data collected will serve as a foundational reference for the potential development of Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications or Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA) between ASEAN nations.

Please note that all information collected will remain strictly confidential. Your responses will only be used for research and discussion purposes. The data will be stored securely and anonymized, ensuring that no individual respondent can be identified. Results will be aggregated for analysis, and the insights gained will contribute to efforts aimed at harmonizing professional standards across the ASEAN region.

Thank you for your time and input. Your contributions will play a crucial role in advancing the MRPQ process and fostering greater collaboration among professionals in the region.

Sincerely,

Name
Professional Regulatory Board of _____

MRPQ Survey Questionnaire
(Version 3: as of 30 September 2024)
General Instructions:
Please respond to each question by either writing in the provided space or checking the appropriate box, as indicated.

_____
Respondent Information
•   Name: _____
•   Sex: _____
•   Age: _____
•   Country: _____
•   Affiliation/Organization: _____
•   Position: _____
•   Email: _____

_____
Section 1: Educational Standards
1.1 What is the minimum educational qualification required to practice your profession
(_____) in your country?
(Please select one)
___ Diploma
___ Bachelor's Degree
___ Master's Degree
___ Doctorate Degree

1.2 How many years of study are required to complete the educational requirements for your profession?

Please specify: _____ years

1.3 Are there recognized institutions in your country offering this educational qualification?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, how many institutions offer this educational qualification? _____

1.4 Is there a standardized curriculum for your profession in your country?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, please provide a brief overview of the core subjects:

_____
_____

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_____

1.5 Are there specialized areas of study within the program for this profession?

___ Yes

___ No

If yes, please list the specializations (e.g. Bachelor of Elementary Education, Major in Math):

Education Program	Specialization
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	

1.6 How does the educational curriculum align with the needs of the local/regional industry?

_____

_____

_____

1.7 Do you have a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in place for this profession in your country?

___ Yes

___ No

If yes, please specify the framework: _____

Section 2: Accreditation and Licensure Processes

2.1 Is passing a licensure examination required to practice this profession (_____) in your country?

___ Yes

___ No

2.2 Which organization administers the licensure examination?

Name of Organization: _____

Address/Location: _____

2.3 What subjects are covered in the licensure examination?

_____

_____

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E-mail Address   : embracingthecultureofresearch@etcor.org
Mobile Number   : 0939-202-9035

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_____
_____

2.4 Are there different levels of professional classification (e.g., junior, senior) based on qualifications or experience?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, please specify the classification levels:
_____
_____
_____

2.5 How long is the professional license/ID valid?
Please specify: _____ years

2.6 What are the requirements for renewing the professional license/ID?
_____
_____

2.7 If there is no licensure examination, what mechanisms exist for professional certification?
_____
_____

2.8 What are the requirements for these alternative mechanisms?
_____
_____

Section 3: Professional Practice Regulations and Compensation
3.1 Is the profession regulated in your country?
___ Yes
___ No

3.2 If yes, what is the name of the regulatory body responsible for overseeing this profession?
_____

3.3 Is the regulatory body a government agency or a private organization?
(Please check what is appropriate.)
___ Government agency
___ Private organization

3.4 Are there any specific laws or regulations governing this profession?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, please specify:
_____

3.5 Are foreign-trained professionals allowed to practice in your country?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, what are the requirements and/or procedures they must follow?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3.6 Are there any professional organization/s for this profession in your country?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, what role does the professional organization play in regulation?
_____
3.7 How many members are in the professional organization? (Please provide an estimate.)
Name of Organization 1: _____
Estimated members: _____

Name of Organization 2: _____
Estimated members: _____

3.8 Is the professional organization recognized or authorized by the government?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, please indicate the name of the government agency/institution.
_____

3.9 What is the average entry-level salary for this profession in your country?
___ Less than $10,000/year
___ $10,001 – $20,000/year
___ $20,001 – $30,000/year
___ More than $30,000/year

3.10 How does the compensation compare to similar professions in your country?
___ Higher

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___ About the same
___ Lower

3.11 Are there any additional benefits (e.g., health insurance, retirement plans) commonly provided to professionals?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, please specify:
_____

3.12 Are there disparities in compensation across different regions within your country?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, please explain:
_____
_____

Section 4: Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
4.1 Is CPD required for license renewal?
___ Yes
___ No

4.2 What types of CPD activities are recognized?
(e.g., formal learning, non-formal learning accredited activities, seminars, conferences, mentoring, Self-Directed Learning (SDL) including professional activity and volunteer engagement, research, and creative works.)
_____
_____
_____
_____

4.3 How many CPD units or hours are required for renewal?
Please specify units or hours required:
Units: _____
Hours: _____

4.4 Who provides CPD programs in your country?
(e.g., professional organizations and educational institutions)
_____

4.5 What challenges do professionals face in meeting CPD requirements?
(Please select all that apply)
___ Financial constraints (e.g., high costs of CPD programs)
___ Limited access to CPD programs (e.g., availability of courses, geographical distance)

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___ Lack of information or awareness about available CPD opportunities
___ Time constraints (e.g., balancing work commitments with CPD)
___ Inconvenient scheduling of CPD activities
___ Limited availability of CPD programs relevant to the profession
___ Insufficient employer support for CPD participation
___ Difficulty in earning sufficient CPD credits within the required timeframe
___ Other (please specify): _____

Section 5: Ethical Standards
5.1 Is there a standardized code of ethics for this profession in your country?
___ Yes
___ No
If yes, who develops and enforces the code of ethics?
_____
If no, please proceed to Section 6.

5.2. Where is ethical training included:
__ Professional Curriculum
___ CPD
___ Both

5.4 What mechanisms exist for addressing ethical violations?
_____
5.5 How does the profession address cultural sensitivity and diversity in practice?
_____
_____

Section 6: Intention for Partnership/Collaboration in the ASEAN Region
Please indicate your intention regarding the following areas of collaboration (check all that apply):
___ Mobility of Professionals
___ Exchange of information on best practices in standards and qualifications
___ Capacity building and training opportunities
___ Collaborative research
_____
This concludes the survey. Thank you for your time and valuable input.