

Foreign Students' Perception on Online Graduate Education in a Philippine University

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ABSTRACT

Online education is an academic offering being eyed by universities as a lucrative venture. The offering of virtual courses allows institutions to intensify international competitiveness and presence. Most universities are determined to attract and reach global student populace to stay ahead and secure their mark as game-changers in a contemporary academic race and make available online courses for foreign graduate students to experience independent intellectual development and professional advancement. It is the primary aim of this study to present the profile of foreign students of a Philippine university. Moreover, a data mine is also provided to preview their shared perception on a preferred instructional model for education from the following: traditional, virtual, or blended. The descriptive research method was employed in the study. The Likert Scale was also used to measure the attitude and strength of the self-assessment of the respondents. The foreign students were in the crossroads of embracing traditional education and virtual or online education for graduate courses. They perceived that traditional education gave the benefit of more personal communication between peers and professors, while online education delivered convenience and flexibility. These opportunities are in no way found in one method alone. Moreover, course offerings, the reputation of the university, and fewer class meetings are factors foreign students consider for online courses.

Keywords — Technology-based instruction, virtual or online courses, descriptive method, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The education sector has been faced with internationalization, characterized by the use of electronic means (Van Raaij and Schepers, 2008). A lot of public [and private] institutions have made online instruction as a critical part of their long-term plans. The upsurge of the internet has led the teaching and learning activity to another height. Online education has emerged as a current proxy to traditional classroom instruction. Global students get more and more attracted to universities open for distance learning and whose international presence is felt by electronic means. The trend of higher education in the future will revolve around the idea where education may be accessed and acquired globally and that there is an ease in choosing courses and universities. Institutions need to be adept in utilizing today's technology as it crafts curriculums and programs to serve their clientele best. Students can be anywhere in the world and still have access to this mode of instruction and anytime. Its convenience is one of the highlights of e-learning. They need not worry about geographical constraints, pressing responsibilities, and class schedules. Contemporary online graduate education is on the "road of creating that new schoolhouse" first (Rovai and Jordan, 2004), where the best interests of students come. However, its success rests on the fact that it does not veer away from mainstream instructional portfolio and mechanism. Despite its new platform, it should not fall short of the very same standard, followed by classic schools (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006). With the advent of technological development online education will remain to be a mainstay. It has already gained popularity. However, the value it renders to students is unsettled (Hislop, 1999). Fedynich, Bradley, and Bradley (2015) indicated that higher education is now attuned to the advances of its field. This is an online version that caters to technology-savvy learners interested in quality online courses.

Competition among universities and colleges no longer stems from the local arena. Foreign rivalry among universities is now part of the picture. Philippine universities start to aim for a far more global reach. It considers the admission of foreign students as part of the country's share in the international market. Virtual education is an opportunity most universities eye on as a gainful avenue to cater to diverse markets locally and internationally. The introduction of such

an alternative enables educational institutions to take its local operations to an international milieu, as it strives to stay atop the worldwide education race. It has a boundary-spanning effect that embraces the diverse culture, race, and tradition of foreign students qualifying them to be part of the university's student populace. Top universities around the world take pride in being internationally recognized for quality education to lure international students across the globe to come to the region and offer prime education to stay ahead in the race. Online graduate programs can be a game-changing endeavor for universities. [International] students who wish to obtain postsecondary education are being offered a more dynamic instructional conveyance that surpasses constraints relating to geography, time, and others (Crawford-Ferre and Wiest, 2012). Online higher education may be viewed as an alternative, but still, it would require prudence in utilizing it (Koskela, Kiltti, Vilpola, and Tervonen, 2005). It fosters highly advanced electronic correspondence that takes place as supported by discussion boards and emails. New approaches of course design, communication among participants, and the preparedness of key players and their support are needed to ensure the success of this online instruction. The e-learning in the educational scenario definitely demands non-traditional professors to transcend their instruction to greater heights and across borders (Barbera, 2004).

The online learning environment is suitable for higher education. There has been no confirmation to support its dominance and lead over the traditional education system. For traditional system enables learners to communicate with fellow students and the teacher. There is a sense of community nurtured from the discourse and interactions. On the other hand, an online learning environment supports expediency, flexibility, up to date learning resources, tailor-cut learning, and online critic and participation is not a problem in online classes since being intimidated by face-to-face interaction is kept at bay. Students may also experience the following: isolation, confusion, frustration in their learning experiences (Ni, A. Y., 2013), and learners are deprived of visual reinforcements (Murphy and Coleman, 2004). It demands time to be involved in an online class forum. However, despite these limitations, online education remains to play a significant role in delivering academic goods. Blended learning [a combination of traditional and online methods] is also worth mentioning as another format for higher education as it gives the best of both worlds of convenience for students to accomplish their course loads via an online and good sense of ties with their peers and professors reinforced by occasional face-to-face classes. It is just banking on the benefit of flexibility and practicality for students to obtain graduate degrees

fortified with campus interactions as extensions to instructions done online as a natural part of the academic structure (Rovai and Jordan, 2004).

The results of the study of Barbera (2004) indicated that online students outdid the lecture students. The students carried the weight of being the master of their advancement in their education and learning. These online learners find it challenging to endure the academic life of online learning if they lack personal motivation and discipline to submit the course outputs and required activities by their professors. They will have to take charge of their pace in studying and be interdependent learners engaged in collaboration with peers and in the lens of global views (Khanser, 2003). It calls out for students' dedication and commitment to meet the demands of their degree in preparation for the demands of the global market for highly skilled and high-performance employees. E-learning enables learners' lifelong scholarly and professional opportunities to stay competitive via postgraduate degrees and advanced training with the practicality of obtaining it at their own stride and comfort (Ni, A. Y., 2013).

The degree to which these students are satisfied tends to vary depending on the state of their readiness in terms of their affective and technical aspects to handle graduate classes via online means and the styles they adopt as learners. Overall, the online graduate students in the study of Kuong (2009) did not have qualms regarding online classes. They recognized how demanding courses and they fend for themselves on course works. Unlike classroom-based classes, consulting or conferring with peers and professors is minimal, if existent. The online graduate students clearly pointed out that the level of connection with others in the digital academia environment tends to affect their learning experience alongside the receptiveness and readiness of students to online classes, the presence of a digital form of collaborative learning environment, and avenues for student engagement. Online education did not pay much attention to the satisfaction of learners. Satisfaction is manifested in the interplay of the nature of the bond they have with the online academic community, support system, course infrastructure, quality of student life, and their own personal characteristics. The online instructor is the source of motivation for learners to persevere and complete the academic requirements. Regular communication can also lessen the uncertainty they feel. The designation of personnel to attend to the needs of online learners and the ease of access on academic resources and support services are important to them, including a well-designed, informative, and up to date web presence that can benefit the learners further (Bolliger and Martindale, 2004). Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, and Edwards (2009) specified that the

involvement and prompt feedback of online instructor in the academic life of the students motivated them to become active and engaged learners. This allows them to advance further in their studies. Fedynich, Bradley, and Bradley (2015) reiterated the satisfaction of graduate university students in online courses stems from their own drive-in meeting the program requirements successfully.

On the other hand, results have shown that the interaction or engagement factor received a low rating of student satisfaction. This, however, can be reinforced by academic structures that provide course works or activities that mediate contact, inter-linkage, and a knowledge-sharing community among peers and professors. Moreover, they also indicated that teachers are at the forefront in ensuring that academic satisfaction and fulfillment are achieved by the learners. There are dimensions that support and recognize teachers' and institutions' efforts in developing expertise in online instruction as a part of high-quality virtual learning environments (Barbera, 2004), where faculty members are actively involved in crafting the effective academic architecture and foresee and address online academic challenges (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006).

Online students are keen on examining the “hardware and software” (Mupinga, Nora, and Yaw, 2006, p. 185) of the online programs they are enrolled in. Most of them work independently and are highly committed to working productively based on their convenient time and place. Online graduate programs serve diverse learners. Each student tags, along with demographics, learning appetite, and academic readiness. The virtual learning environment cannot simply identify and accommodate all these idiosyncrasies but, they deliver flexible learning opportunities for these learners. These students are attentive to details pertaining to supervision, teaching styles, and the reputation and recognition of online courses with the rest of the academic village. Based on Mupinga, Nora, and Yaw (2006), there is no uniform style that online learners manifest. Thus, the online learning environment should be able to cater to all their diverse studying needs. There are discussion boards, chat rooms, and other online communication tools to exhaust for them to share their insights and, at the same time, seek advice from peers and professors. They may also be provided with animated learning materials complete with auditory features to motivate them further. These online students continuously seek for immediate and periodic communication and feedback from professors to guide them in their graduate school journey. Also, they expect clear instructions on course works and other course-related requirements and information to ensure their timeline is aligned

with their program. Roach and Lemasters (2006) discussed different factors that have bearing on online institutions' operations. The instructional portfolio serves as the key element in which students assess. It also influences their academic satisfaction of the online graduate program. Moreover, academic stimulation, the rapport between faculty-student-peer, clarity of instructions on course works, and outcomes expected of the learner also add up to it. Hislop (1999) highlighted that the proportion between students and teachers must be substantially addressed to allow interactions and favorable mentor-mentee relationships formed. Moreover, diverse instruction styles can be directed to student background, thereby allowing flexibility in their involvement. Academic performance is contingent on how well teaching styles meet the learning expectations of online international graduate students. Factors used to assess these expectations include the mentor-mentee relationship, delivery, and academic programs and their support systems. The diversity of culture among international students just adds up to the challenge of online graduate programs. Expectations of these students when it comes to administration and learning structure of the graduate program must be clearly posted by online universities as this would tend to influence their performance and other academic attributes to attrition rates. Doctorate supervisors in online programs need to be answerable for the learning outcomes of students as the online graduate degrees are expensive, and students should not be left to fend for themselves in their online academic journey, let alone rely on their learning mode. Supervisors need to tailor cut teaching methodology to be able to address students' necessities. In the study of Erichsen and Bolliger (2011), they revealed that Asian students felt that their intellectual contributions were not highly recognized by other students and instructors. However, European students felt differently, and the opposite, it appeared that they felt fulfilled with their academic performance since their views were regarded as equals. And yet still, a sense of detachment is an increasing academic concern of international students; this challenges academic supervisors to ensure a pool of nurturing and compassionate learning facilitators. Khanser (2003) stipulated that there is no significant link between online interaction and higher performance of students obtaining passing grades.

Power was once dominated by the rich countries of the West, Asians watched and began wanting the same status to wriggle free their dire conditions. They, too, wanted to be the new economic hub. Educating themselves is one solution. They studied abroad. But when the internet came, opportunities for online university spread for U.S., U.K., and Australia. It did not work well; what they thought of

as a new venture turned to be an academic mishap. Despite the huge amounts of investment to the new education platform, they lose out to the local providers like Malaysia. Online learning may have sustained its operations, but it has never freed itself from shaky issues. The issue of access to online education is on its way to be settled. Asia's market is oozing, the region's combined population and that of neighboring regions can be accounted for. However, it is in the issue of quality that stirs interests and questions. Asia was predominantly defined by traditional education and yet adopted with the world in its use of e-learning to be able to power up economic and civic progress in the region. As far as online higher education in this region is concerned, issues of "access, quality, and accreditation" (Reeves, 2008, p. 577). has remained fuzzy. The challenge is on the delivery of e-learning in ways distinct from traditional education. Asian higher education gets a poor reputation with issues of limited funds, poor infrastructure conditions, incompetent personnel, and overcrowding pulling it down. Course offerings and the expected outcomes add up to the list. It appears that universities are more interested in intensifying their campaign to garner many students rather than attending to the quality of education they provide. It is remarkable that ASEAN countries, all ten of them, proliferated e-learning. However, the challenge lies in the level of accreditation their online graduate programs get across countries. A degree obtained from, let us say, country A may not be well received by country B, which makes it pointless to obtain an online degree. Charmonman (2005) proposed for ASEAN country leaders ink acceptance and credit to e-learning degrees conferred by any ASEAN government, thus ensuring the availability of skilled manpower all throughout the region and economic development as well. Another option would be to create a commission that accredits all e-learning programs in ASEAN countries.

The online university must be able to meet the requisites set by its market - confidence and credence, courseware, competence in delivery, and other significant factors that attract students. In Singapore, online education has not received the same level of acceptance as that of traditional education; the latter is viewed as more effective. The reluctance is reflected in the number of enrolment on online courses. It is not completely a hopeless case for online education to prosper in Singapore (Chung and Ellis, 2003). Furthermore, a country like Cambodia, may have to wait for the preparedness of its educators with the proper training and committed to teaching. Richardson, Nash, and Flora (2014) argued that to some extent, computer or Internet literacy of students is improving. However, their fear of being unguided in the learning process might put at risk

learning outcomes. It would take a skilled instructor to guide them so that they can use the device properly and contribute insights thereafter.

Online universities now have a greater responsibility to serve the rest of the world and not limited to its locale. Generation, transmission and reception of knowledge are no longer restricted to a particular place or time. Awour and Parks (2015) posed a challenge to educators at the graduate level to start reinventing themselves for the digital reality. Academic programs should embrace diversity in style to address instruction, may it be face to face or distanced, mentoring relationships, the interaction of students with their peers, and exposure to other cultures. Learnings have evolved, so should methods of learning. Failure to keep up with times can lead to leaner clientele and losing out in the international rivalry. Universities offer academic lifestyle when they go digital in making information available and accessible through electronic devices that know no time or place. With online education at hand, it becomes an avenue for revolutionizing the vistas of learners that leaned on local mentality into multi-perspective with a global lens. It will totally be life-changing. The new learning platform must be able to build the character of its learners as they deal with realities brought by different aspects of life - economic, political, and social, among many others.

The Philippines is home to many universities, including those that are internationally recognized and deliver a good quality of academic programs. With this, the researcher endeavors to probe on the potential of online graduate education in a Philippine university and identify factors aspects that comprise international students' insight on such academic goods.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study focuses on the possible factors affecting foreign students' perception of a Philippine university in obtaining a graduate diploma via online means. Specifically, it endeavors to address the following: (1) The foreign student profile of a Philippine University in the first semester of the school year 2015-2016; (2) the preferred mode of learning and obtaining graduate degree; (3) the advantages and disadvantages of the different modes of learning or obtaining a graduate degree: (a) Traditional; (b) Virtual or Online; (c) Combination of Traditional and Virtual or Online [Blended]; (4) the factors considered by foreign students of their university choice for graduate programs; (5) the perceived challenges that foreign students will encounter in virtual or online graduate classes.

FRAMEWORK

With the World Wide Web introduced in the early 90s, it began the mark of global presence because of its novel mode of communication and networking with such speed. Education was one field that benefited by such development. Education is rendered through traditional, blended, and online means, but the 21st century paved the way for online education. It has revolutionized the field, pedagogy, and delivery wise. Educators had to reorient and reengineer themselves to be able to keep up with such advancements. The rise of electronic mails and web conferencing has indeed backed the culture of sharing within the online academic community. After more than two decades since its introduction, online education has already established itself, methodology, and its system. Virtual universities put new players into the picture. Professors, students, courses, and universities are digitally packaged. Online professors are expected to be engaging and highly competent in their fields. The students of online universities are those who choose courses delivered via the Internet to cater to their convenience where access to course requirements is not restricted to time and place (Harasim, 2000).

The digital age calls for corporations and universities alike to adopt contemporary global presence and led to the proliferation of online training for professional experts to be able to meet the corporate and academic needs of modern society. Moreover, in the recruitment process of professional resources, companies search for applicants' experience and competencies, the ability to communicate and exude professionalism, educational background, and knowledge of their chosen field and how they are apt in the organization unit (Connolly and Diepenbrock, 2011). Given two platforms in delivering graduate programs, the residential format promises a personalized campus-based environment, and the online offering is packaged as more flexible access regardless of location and more direct mentoring practices. Jones, Warren, Cole, Knezek, Lin, and Norris (2014) presented the progression of the doctorate program from its residential roots to its online version. One of its objectives is to disseminate the insights they have gathered in planning and implementing the new hybrid platform of doctorate degrees. The residential program for Ph.D. at the University of North Texas catered to students who work full time, whereby blended classes were adopted. With this format, most of the course requirements were given online - about 50% or even more. Some considerable skills in the technical aspect have been required from the students to be able to tackle course works. The online format was primarily introduced to be able to propel students to be active in completing

their course works and be able to graduate within the time frame of their program. It was not helpful that the location of the campus is miles away from where the students were. Online classes were intended to support their students. In implementing the new system came with hefty challenges on the faculty line up and loading issues, costs of maintaining online classes, obtaining students for the program, avoid disturbance on existing residential programs, also, not to jeopardize the integrity of the two educational modalities of delivery, there are mainstay components that characterize the degrees. Elements of admission, course-related matters, university policies, and outcomes are the same for the two formats.

The omnipresence of technology has modernized the way people live and learn. Online studies are alluring options for getting a degree. Chau (2010) discussed the contemporary shift of education towards an online platform. Its financial desirability to universities makes it more attractive to join the digital bandwagon. Over the years, there is a significant interest in online education. Higher education gets a new image as a commodity ready to be served to its eager market. In relation to business, it has come to synergistic terms to expand its market base and sustain its operations over time. Many universities see offering their online courses as part of their strategic plans. In online education, working professionals' needs are addressed to be able to cater to their diverse issues, including work schedules, financial status, or workloads. Despite the initial reluctance of embracing digital education, a university can actually become an embodiment of success. A university with an online graduate program promoted through intensive advertisements will likely become a big hit. Chau (2010) presented some of the more upfront authors and their views on online education. Some viewed it as subordinate to classic education mode, while others see its impending recognition as advanced type. However, it is contested that its business perspective should not cloud the very mission of institutions to educate students as prime movers of society as supposed to corporate resources. When higher education is presented in a business-like manner, it descends from its esteemed learning status to a mere training center.

Some institutions came into terms that online education should be part of their strategic planning. However, the others are not fully certain of its contribution. School administrators of institutions that offer online programs rate it as better than the traditional mode of instruction. But figures over the years have not consistently shown the superiority of such a system. Some are still hopeful that a blended form of instruction can present a better option rather than

purely online means (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, and Straut, 2016). In the study of Robertson, Grant, and Jackson (2005), the students' perception of online studies proved to be similar or even better than face to face classes. Moreover, they pointed out that a lot can be learned from the former and an implication that online graduate courses can also provide the same quality of learning environment as that of campus classes. Likewise, online classes offer more time for students to finish their course requirements at their most convenient and productive time. Clearly, their own pace and judgment play an important role in completing it—higher education appeals for degrees and programs in the online platform. Students appealed for online adoption, and universities are paying attention to it. Top universities in the United States have already joined the online education bandwagon.

The number of enrolments in higher education in the U.S. has declined. However, there is a growing pattern in distance education. There are four types of courses indicated in the study that cater to the education system of the state – traditional, web facilitated, blended or hybrid, and online. The traditional course leaves no content delivered virtually, and most course-related activities are personally given. On the other hand, web facilitated ones make use of web pages to post-course requirements and are utilized to facilitate face to face classes. Moreover, blended or hybrid courses provide a combination and balance of classes rendered online and limited face to face sessions. Finally, an online course requires no face to face meetings where 80% of its content is accessible and rendered online (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, and Straut, 2016). Course offerings in the digital system are available for commerce, education, and the medical field, among other programs. Even university professors have now heeded to the online presence by making available their course and its materials on the Internet. The best practices in the online learning environment are yet to be discovered. For each learner, their experience is different from the others, getting to know these [experiences] might just draw the attributes helpful in upholding online learning operations. Students should be consulted as far as its authenticity and practicality are concerned. For them, it is apparent that their online learning experience is desirable, depending on the course structure and convenience it brings. They are concerned with problems involving technical aspects, the collaboration they have with peers and professors, issues of time, and the expected course outcomes of the program they are enrolled in.

Song, Singleton, Hill, and Koh (2004) stated that the perception of students on online learning indicated that it allowed them to contemplate the kind of

response they post on the Web on discussion avenues. They are concerned with the digital footprints they leave in terms of how strong or weak their arguments or answers over a topic, after all, it is not only the class which has access to it, so does the world. Online classes are flexible enough to fit in the different schedules of students. Learning has always addressed their pace. The convenience of being able to access course resources in the comfort of one's preferred study locale is another advantage of the online class. Students in online classes experience a lag of response or feedback from their peers and professors. This tends to bother them as the learning process is paused in a way, having to wait for replies—the feeling of being left alone to understand and figure out course requirements isolated them. The connection, supposed to be, with peers and professors are now left in the hands of the learner to establish. For other learners under a blended learning environment, a prearranged regular meeting was set for the class to meet. Under such circumstances, the learners and their professors formed bonds, and as result, rapport was established and even extended in their online forum. Digital professors play a significant role in facilitating good rapport among digital students, but at times students are even doubtful of the competence of their peers, and mentors add more to the challenges they experience. However, the once dignified educator gets a new persona of an invisible facilitator in digital education, almost out of the picture. And yet, manifest mechanistic skills that demand they be available round the clock at the “beck and call” (Chau, 2010, p. 185) of their students. Online students experience challenges in their online contact, and they will have to learn things on their own.

Online classes through diverse in its media for learning can prove to be less advantageous because of issues pertaining to interaction and alienation to peers and professors. It proved problematic. To be able to keep up with the digital milieu, the teaching methodologies should keep up with technology too. The mere transmission of information is no longer acceptable. The digital professor must now engage students into making their own perspectives known, those that manifest advanced cognitive knacks. They are expected to exude confidence in their command of education skills [and interpersonal skills included]. Students are wary over the lack of opportunities for creative thinking and cognitive skills since their preoccupation comprised of lectures, numerous readings, and assignments. This results in mediocre performance. It is too concentrated on the transfer of knowledge rather than creating new ones. What promotes online classes are the learning engagements coming from interaction and instruction. Students feel the disconnection from their academic circle, faculty, and peers alike. It proves

problematic since the quality of academic life as addressed by their relations to others is a vital component too. Social exchanges developed throughout the online sessions appeal to students, as this often leads to rapport, integration, and overall satisfaction. The availability of the instructors to address each concern of the students and offer feedback can paint a good picture of online education. The benefits of the flexibility of complying with course requirements based on personal convenience are added to the list. The promptness of their feedback is expected by students, especially digital means (Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens, 2012).

The Internet provides equal chances for all students to learn. Most of them have been hooked to technology. However, the non-traditional ones have a higher inclination on getting certification through online means rather than the traditional education system. The major benefits students get from online classes is the boundless and round the clock access and linkage to professional service, academic resources, and a circle of peers. Although promising, online education does not sit well for all types of students. There are a number of factors that need to think about. The predisposition of mode, how they learn, and their vistas about education can definitely affect their learning in the digital platform. How online classes are delivered can have a bearing too. Moreover, the personal drive of a student to work independently adds more to the already challenging nature of online education. It is crucial to plan the different aspects of online education carefully in terms of its programs, course content and outcome, and mechanism. Traditional classes and virtual ones require different bases for assessing their effectiveness. No standard tool can be used to measure the two alike. Online education is assessed through how well it meets course outcomes, the learning environment it provides, monitoring the mentor-mentee relationship, course configuration that allows students to maximize all avenues of learning in the virtual environment. “Electronic academic village” (Craig, 2001, p. 215) empowers mentors and mentees to become ardent learners who are fueled by their own passion for learning in a digital environment. Online students must be adept at technology for them to have an added sense of confidence in meeting the course requirements as they would mostly rely on themselves and their own pace. The researcher was determined to address concerns on the state of technological competence among students when it comes to meeting the essentials of online courses, how well course requirements contribute to their professional life, the impact it has on their knowledge, and their tendency to adopt the same system. Connolly and Diepenbrock (2011) indicated that online education had not

reached the level of being viewed superior compared to classical education that entails face to face meetings. The former does not fully deliver students with the needed personalized avenue for exchange of ideas with peers and mentors, not to mention that academic experience remains to be unattended as well.

Connolly and Diepenbrock (2011) believe that those enrolled in virtual education are still provided with opportunities to interact through campus facilities and other means. However, face to face encounters remains unequalled. Given the same credentials, some school administrators are reluctant to admit to their graduate programs those students who got their college degree through online means, however, there is better reception for those who had theirs on blended methods. Both online and classic education programs have their own attractive quality. Moreover, the two can also present effective or ineffective courses or curricula. In the years to come, more and more professionals are likely to be open to virtual education and actually obtain their degrees in this new system. Online education is fit for certain fields, but not all. Programs need to be recognized, and course programs need to be responsive to the need of its target client. The growing competence among professionals and the emergence of online education reinforces its vital role in the academic sector in better preparing its studentry to the professional world, and those graduates who have been used to the comforts of digital classes are also the ones usually open to having it in obtaining their master degree.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study made use of the descriptive survey method that provided an account of the respondents' perspectives and explained the online graduate program. The researcher sought assistance from the university office, handling foreign student affairs. It was deemed convenient for facilitating, identifying, and persuading the respondents to take part in the study. One hundred eighty foreign students were enrolled in college in different courses in the first semester of the school year 2015-2016. Respondents were randomly selected, and 61 foreign students took time to answer the heed of the international coordinator's advisory to visit the office and answer a 10 item survey questionnaire. This condition established some degree of formality, and respondents felt safe knowing that there was proper communication and in campus venue.

Research Setting

The Philippine university in the study was situated in a tranquil community adjacent to the sea and is known for its “university town” ambiance in the Philippines and also serves as a retirement hub for multinationals who have been lured to enjoy a hospitable and tranquil city. The campus occupies a massive land area of more than 50 hectares. It prides itself on sprawling greeneries where scenic views are seen across diverse angles in college buildings. The institution harbors academic artisans that mold scholars of various disciplines only to leave its imprints known locally and internationally.

Participants

The respondents of the online graduate study were students from around the world (foreign students) of a Philippine university. They come from different parts of the world: Europe, the US, Asia, Africa, and other continents.

Only the perspectives and opinions of foreign/international students, as reflected in their answers on the survey questionnaires, were solicited for the reason that it truly reflects their views and sentiments on the said study. Other representatives were not considered to avoid bias, contamination of data, or even competing interests.

Instrumentation

Data were gathered through survey questionnaires to carry out a data mine and profile of the foreign students of a Philippine university and depict their shared perception on their preferred instructional model for education: traditional, virtual, or blended.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Foreign students come from different parts of the world. In this Philippine university, the countries that have a fair number of students enrolled are Papua New Guinea and South Korea. Most of the respondents based on the age bracket are undergraduate students aging 17 to 21 years old; more than half of them did not have intentions to pursue a master’s degree. They took up further studies to obtain a higher qualification of skills and training in their field, to stay competitive, enrich themselves in search of personal passion and motivation, and life-long learning interest.

International students viewed the major disadvantages of the traditional method as a rigid structure, its inability to keep up with times and trends, and student participation and interaction kept at bay. More than half of the respondents are aware of the online or virtual alternative learning system, while others are still attached to the traditional classroom lecture. Those in favor of the virtual system account for roughly 15%, and one-third of the respondents showed interest in blended learning or the combination of traditional and virtual learning systems.

In line with their views on the different education methods or modes, here are the findings: the two major reasons why respondents preferred the *traditional method* of classes include the impression teacher-student face to face interaction and guided learning were inimitable. On the other hand, the advantages indicated by respondents for the *virtual learning system* focus on flexible class schedules, lower education costs, and the convenience of obtaining an online degree. What is more, seventy percent of those respondents who chose *blended learning* spotted the advantages of face to face interaction between peers and professors, and more than 50% observed the gain that goes with adaptable and accommodating class schedules with the convenience of obtaining a degree online.

The Issues that arise from online education range from technological matters as well as the accessibility of support services online. What concerns students' blended method was primarily the same as that of the earlier mentioned methods. The rigid structure disadvantage from traditional classes was supported by one-third of the respondents who could not keep up with time and which offered little participation and interaction. More than 50% of the respondents indicated the deficiencies of virtual classes were in technology, social interaction, and the accessibility of support services. In the blended system, almost 50% of issues took account of interaction, technology, and keeping up with changes and trends. However, as disclosed further, the stability and speed of the internet further challenge the method.

More than 70% viewed the online degree as effective. There were reservations because some countries do not acknowledge online degrees. In addition, there was an implication for the need of guidance from teachers and students wary over-complicated electronic preparations. Fifty-three percent of those who responded assumed that online credentials may be considered in their jobs. However, over one third believed online credentials were of no use. The reliability and acceptance of international students' credentials across the globe contributed to their reluctance. But the hopefuls still bank on the idea that it can provide them added knowledge and skills, more than 60% of them.

Respondents consider the following factors in their choice for an online course: first – course offering, second – the reputation of the school, and third – the minimal actual classroom-based meetings. Lastly, respondents indicated their trust or distrust on online degrees. But positively, the added knowledge, discipline, and course works will hone them to be better professionals. Perceived challenges encountered in online education rested on technological issues, the online support they will be getting, their individual role as students who will do independent work most of the time, among other issues.

CONCLUSIONS

Students-respondents find the following factors important when they consider enrolling in graduate online courses: first – course offering, second – the reputation of the school, and, third – the minimal actual classroom-based meetings. For many students, nothing outclasses the effectiveness and productivity of the old, traditional, and trusted educational mode where teacher and student interaction is done face to face. There are hints of accommodating the present trends of highly electronic modes of transferring or facilitating knowledge. Most students or learners are yet to be introduced to the independent learning techniques since they have been used to the traditional way and with the teachers around to attend to their questions and other concerns. There is a need to cater to the convenience demands of the virtual students as they prepare to stay competitive in their fields.

Students fear that their current credentials may not provide an edge if it does not keep up with the changes of time —an outdated one. There is hesitation in adopting a conventional electronic conveyance of education to obtain a degree since the Philippines' technological aspect is yet to be developed further, and there is a dearth in the access to support services. The reluctance of possible virtual students can be appeased if they are properly oriented regarding the program where technical support is available incessantly. It will also be useful to design the system as user-friendly and simple.

There is a good opportunity for the university to introduce online courses for these foreign students. The university [research subject] in the Philippines has garnered the trust, confidence, and openness of its foreign students to online graduate programs in the long run.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The results of the study may be translated into the adoption of a new business model for course offerings and proper allocation of university resources and manpower that best serve international graduate student clientele.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With more than half of the respondents are aware of an alternative learning system – online or virtual learning education, this Philippine university must be adept at delivering the online graduate program. Its potential market is ready to be tapped. It should prepare its curriculum, manpower, and online academic structure, among other factors. It already has a reputation that commands recognition of the university degrees' credentials across the borders, having met international standards. The university must endeavor to intensify its campaign on an online graduate program. It should carefully design the overall process to ensure the viability and sustainability of the program. The university cannot simply put aside the traditional method of teaching and instantaneously shift to electronic means. A blended learning system may be initially adopted, where face to face interaction among class members is complemented with activities and correspondence done via online. Eventually, the expediency of the online graduate program will happen.

Further exploration of the virtual education model must be pursued to give this method proper credence and advanced to earn acceptability among international students. It is recommended that future research cover upgraded online graduate course offerings aligned to fit the corporate, academic, and government demands and, most importantly, fit its clients – the international students. Academic resources and manpower for the effective design of an online graduate program are also worth investigating. Collaboration and coordination of academic research efforts with government education agencies are crucial to creating implementing guidelines for online education providers and universities to guide them in their operations, among other vital matters.

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