

# Intercultural Competencies, Management Support, Institutional Strategies and Internationalization Practices of Local Colleges in Northern Mindanao, Philippines

Voltaire B. Torrion<sup>1</sup>, Nenita I. Prado<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Liceo de Cagayan University

<sup>1</sup>[vtorrion81373@liceo.edu.ph](mailto:vtorrion81373@liceo.edu.ph)

<sup>2</sup>[nprado@liceo.edu.ph](mailto:nprado@liceo.edu.ph)

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## ABSTRACT

Internationalization has become a central strategic priority in higher education, requiring institutions to integrate global perspectives into governance systems, academic programs, and institutional services. However, empirical research on internationalization remains largely focused on research-intensive universities, with limited attention given to publicly funded local colleges in developing regions. This study examined the internationalization practices of local government-funded colleges in Northern Mindanao, Philippines, and their relationship with intercultural competencies, management support, and institutional strategies. Using a quantitative descriptive

design, data were collected from 296 faculty and staff members across thirteen local colleges through a structured survey instrument with established reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .756-.987). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the levels of the key constructs. Results revealed that respondents demonstrated high levels of intercultural competencies ( $M = 4.32$ ) and perceived management support ( $M = 4.07$ ). Institutional strategies were also rated high ( $M = 3.74$ ), indicating that governance and operational systems supporting internationalization are generally present. However, internationalization practices were only moderately developed ( $M = 3.14$ ), with stronger institutional commitment and leadership alignment but relatively weaker mobility programs, faculty investment, and external funding mechanisms. The findings suggest that while strategic commitment to internationalization exists, resource-dependent components remain constrained in publicly funded institutions. This study contributes to higher education management literature by highlighting the importance of governance-driven institutional strategies in advancing internationalization in resource-constrained settings and offers policy-relevant insights for strengthening internationalization in local colleges operating under public accountability frameworks.

**Keywords:** *internationalization practices, institutional strategies, management support, intercultural competencies, higher education, local colleges*

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## INTRODUCTION

Internationalization has become a core strategic agenda in higher education management. Institutions are increasingly expected to integrate global perspectives into governance systems, academic programs, human resource policies, and institutional services. In contemporary higher education, internationalization is no longer limited to mobility initiatives but has evolved into an institutional transformation strategy influencing competitiveness, quality assurance, and long-term sustainability (De Wit et al., 2020).

From a governance perspective, effective internationalization requires coherent institutional direction and alignment between strategic planning, leadership commitment, resource allocation, and operational systems. Clarke and Kirby (2022) emphasize that organizational capacity and human resource development are central to sustaining global engagement. Without structures that support faculty development, partnership management, and internationally oriented services, initiatives may remain symbolic rather than operational. Similarly, Silva Noro et al. (2024) highlight the importance of governance mechanisms and strategic communication in strengthening partnerships and accountability. However, rigid administrative systems and limited financial flexibility may restrict innovation and responsiveness (Arifianti et al., 2024). These insights reinforce the view that internationalization is a systems-driven organizational process.

Internationalization also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Within a management framework, these goals translate into strengthening quality systems, building sustainable collaborations, and enhancing global competitiveness. For publicly funded institutions, this requires balancing strategic ambition with accountability and responsible resource management.

Despite expanding scholarship, empirical research remains concentrated on research-intensive universities in developed contexts. Limited attention has been given to local government-funded colleges in developing regions, where governance structures and funding models differ significantly. In the Philippines, local colleges operate under the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (RA 10931), which expands access while increasing expectations for institutional performance and sustainability. How these institutions institutionalize internationalization within structural and financial constraints remains underexplored.

The study aimed to determine the internationalization practices of local colleges in Northern Mindanao and their relationship with intercultural competencies, management support, and institutional strategies. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of intercultural competencies of faculty and staff among local colleges in Northern Mindanao in terms of attitude, knowledge and understanding, skills, and desired internal results?
2. What is the level of management support as perceived by the faculty and staff of local colleges in Northern Mindanao in terms of provision of resources, structural arrangements, communication, expertise, and power?

3. What is the level of institutional strategies as perceived by the faculty and staff of local colleges in Northern Mindanao in terms of governance, operations, services, and human resources?
4. What is the level of internationalization practices among local colleges in Northern Mindanao in terms of articulated institutional commitment, mobility for teaching and learning, research collaboration, institutional networks, social engagement, governance and leadership, external funding, and institutional investment in faculty?

By providing empirical evidence from publicly funded local colleges in a developing regional context, the study contributes to higher education management literature in three ways. First, it extends dynamic capability perspectives to resource-constrained higher education settings. Second, it offers a governance-centered explanation of internationalization practices beyond mobility-focused models. Third, it provides context-specific insights relevant to institutions operating under public accountability frameworks.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quantitative, non-experimental descriptive research design. The descriptive component determined the levels of intercultural competencies, management support, institutional strategies, and internationalization practices among local colleges. This design was appropriate because the study analyzed naturally occurring variables without manipulation.

### **Research Setting**

The study was conducted among thirteen (13) local government-funded colleges in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. These institutions operate under the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act (RA 10931) and function within structured governance and accountability systems. Their public funding model and regional diversity provided an appropriate context for examining strategy-driven internationalization in resource-constrained environments.

### **Participants and Sampling Procedure**

The participants consisted of full-time faculty and staff members with at least one year of service to ensure familiarity with institutional policies and operational practices. From a total population of 1,279 employees, a sample size of 296 respondents was determined using a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation across institutions, thereby reducing sampling bias and improving generalizability within the regional context. The achieved sample size satisfies conventional requirements for correlational analysis and provides sufficient statistical power for detecting medium effect sizes at the 0.01 level of significance.

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### **Research Instrument and Reliability**

Data were collected using a structured survey questionnaire grounded in established internationalization and intercultural competence frameworks. The instrument measured four major constructs: intercultural competencies, management support, institutional strategies, and internationalization practices. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, a widely accepted scaling technique for measuring perceptions and organizational constructs. Prior to full administration, a pilot test was conducted with 30 individuals who shared the same characteristics as the respondents. Reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha methodology. Results showed strong internal consistency across all constructs, where alpha coefficients ranged from .756 to .987, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 for acceptable reliability (Hair et al., 2019). These results indicate that the instrument reliably measures multidimensional institutional constructs suitable for higher education management research.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Prior to data gathering, the researcher secured written permission from the presidents of the participating local colleges. The purpose of the study, target respondents, and data handling procedures were clearly communicated to institutional leaders to ensure a consistent process across the 13 colleges. Coordination with designated research coordinators who served as focal persons was done to identify eligible respondents based on the inclusion criteria: employees in a full-time status and with at least one year of service. This ensured that participants had sufficient institutional exposure to provide informed responses about governance systems, institutional strategies, and internationalization practices.

The researcher distributed the questionnaires personally with the consent information attached to the questionnaire. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary, that they could decline or discontinue at any point without consequences, and that their responses would be used only for academic purposes. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the instrument during a convenient schedule to avoid work disruption. Completed questionnaires were collected in sealed envelopes to protect privacy and avoid influence from supervisors or colleagues. Upon retrieval, the researcher checked each questionnaire for completeness without inspecting individual identities. All valid questionnaires were then coded and encoded for statistical analysis. Hard copies were securely stored, and electronic files were password-protected and accessible only to the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data cleaning was performed before running statistical tests. This included checking for incomplete responses, identifying missing data patterns, and screening for obvious encoding errors.

In this study, means and standard deviations were computed for each variable and its sub-dimensions. Grand means were calculated by averaging item scores within each subscale, then averaging

across subscales to obtain an overall score per construct. Results were then organized according to the study objectives and presented using tables for clarity and replicability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review authority prior to data collection. Formal permission was also secured from the participating local colleges. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to decline or withdraw at any time, and the intended academic use of the data. The survey did not collect names or employee identification numbers, ensuring anonymity. All data were reported in aggregate form to prevent identification of individual respondents or specific institutions.

The study complied with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) of the Philippines. Collected data were used solely for research purposes, securely stored, and accessible only to the researcher. Electronic files were password-protected, and hard copies were kept in secure storage. Data will be retained only for academic publication purposes and disposed of appropriately thereafter.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Level of Intercultural Competencies**

Table 6 presents the summary of respondents' intercultural competencies across four sub-constructs: attitude, knowledge and understanding, skills, and desired internal results.

**Table 1.** Summary of Respondents' Responses on their Level of Intercultural Skills

<b>Sub-Constructs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Attitude	4.33	0.52	Agree	High
Knowledge and understanding	4.29	0.48	Agree	High
Skills	4.41	0.59	Agree	High
Desired Internal Results	4.27	0.53	Agree	High
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.32</b>	<b>0.45</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>High</b>

Overall, respondents obtained a composite mean of 4.32 with a standard deviation of 0.45, interpreted as High, indicating that faculty and staff generally demonstrate strong intercultural competence as a whole. The relatively low overall standard deviation suggests consistent self-assessments, implying that intercultural competence is not isolated to a few individuals but is broadly shared among respondents.

Among the four dimensions, Skills registered the highest mean ( $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ), indicating that respondents most strongly demonstrate practical intercultural communication behaviors. This supports

the view that intercultural competence becomes most visible when expressed through communication behaviors and soft skills in daily organizational life (Strickland, 2023; Buchi, 2019; Burikova, 2020) . In globalized academic settings, these communication skills are especially important because intercultural effectiveness depends not only on awareness but also on how individuals interact, interpret cues, and respond appropriately during real-time engagement (Pllana, 2021; Ilie, 2019).

Consequently, Desired Internal Results obtained the lowest mean ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ). This reflects strong internal outcomes such as cultural sensitivity and global mindset, but it also implies that the most advanced internal outcomes, particularly deep adaptability and sustained internal transformation, may require continued institutional support and structured development initiatives. This aligns with the argument that desired internal results are strengthened through deliberate training, reflective learning, and collaborative intercultural engagement rather than exposure alone (Deardorff, 2020; Cruz & Cruz, 2023; Tran & Vu, 2020). In the Northern Mindanao context, localized intercultural frameworks and sustained institutional programs can further support these internal outcomes and strengthen readiness for internationalization (Sarmiento & Delgado, 2022; Juanzo, 2024).

Nevertheless, Table 6 shows a coherent pattern, in which respondents demonstrate the strongest outcomes in observable intercultural behaviors and positive orientations toward diversity, supported by solid cultural knowledge, while desired internal results remain an area where deeper, long-term development can still be strengthened. This pattern is consistent with intercultural competence, emphasizing that skills and attitudes are critical foundations for effective intercultural functioning and for sustaining internationalization efforts in higher education institutions (Deardorff, 2021; Spencer-Oatey & Stadler, 2022; D’aniello et al., 2022).

### Level of Management Support

Table 2 summarizes the perceived management support level as perceived by the faculty and staff among local colleges across five sub-constructs: provision of resources, structural arrangements, communication, expertise, and power.

**Table 2.** Summary of Respondents' Responses on their Perceived Level of Management Support

Sub-Constructs	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
Provision of Resources	3.95	0.69	Agree	High
Structural Arrangements	4.03	0.74	Agree	High
Communication	4.14	0.76	Agree	High
Expertise	4.12	0.76	Agree	High
Power	4.09	0.78	Agree	High
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>4.07</b>	<b>0.67</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>High</b>

Respondents reported an overall composite mean of  $M = 4.07$  ( $SD = 0.67$ ), interpreted as High, indicating strong perceived management support across the participating institutions. This suggests that leadership structures are generally viewed as actively facilitating and enabling internationalization efforts.

Among the dimensions, Communication obtained the highest mean ( $M = 4.14$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ), indicating that respondents most strongly perceive management support through clear guidance, mentoring, transparency, and alignment of goals. Effective communication is widely recognized as a critical mechanism for institutional coordination and strategic implementation, particularly in complex organizational settings such as higher education (Thelen et al., 2022; Silva Noro et al., 2024). Strong communication practices enhance trust, clarify expectations, and support organizational responsiveness during institutional change processes.

In contrast, Provision of Resources recorded the lowest mean ( $M = 3.95$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ). Although still interpreted as High, this comparatively lower rating suggests that financial, material, or structural resources may represent the most constrained dimension of management support. This pattern reflects ongoing challenges in higher education resource allocation, particularly in publicly funded institutions operating under accountability and budgetary pressures (Nadeem, 2024; Cornito, 2021). The findings indicate that while leadership commitment is clearly perceived, resource distribution may not be uniformly experienced across institutional units.

Overall, the results demonstrate that management support in these colleges is more strongly manifested through relational and communicative mechanisms than through material resource provision, highlighting the central role of leadership processes in sustaining institutional initiatives.

### Level of Institutional Strategies

Table 3 presents the level of institutional strategies as perceived by the faculty and staff of local colleges in Northern Mindanao in terms of governance, operations, services, and human resources.

**Table 3.** Summary of Respondents' Responses on their Perceived Level of Institutional Strategies

Sub-Constructs	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
Governance	3.91	0.78	Agree	High
Operations	3.77	0.84	Agree	High
Services	3.61	0.91	Agree	High
Human Resources	3.68	0.96	Agree	High
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>High</b>

Respondents reported an overall composite mean of  $M = 4.09$  ( $SD = 0.64$ ) for institutional strategies, interpreted as High. This indicates that strategic systems supporting internationalization are generally perceived as well established across governance, operations, services, and human resource functions. The findings suggest that internationalization is not treated as an isolated initiative but is embedded within broader institutional planning and administrative structures.

Among the dimensions, Operations recorded the highest mean ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ), indicating strong perceptions that internationalization-related processes are integrated into day-to-day institutional workflows and implementation mechanisms. Effective operational alignment is critical for translating strategic intent into measurable outcomes, particularly in higher education institutions navigating complex regulatory and organizational environments (Silva Noro et al., 2024; Clarke & Kirby, 2022). High operational scores suggest that institutional systems are responsive and capable of supporting structured international engagement.

Conversely, Human Resources obtained the lowest mean ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ). Although still rated High, this comparatively lower value suggests that faculty development, workload allocation, and incentive mechanisms related to internationalization may require further strengthening. Recent studies indicate that human capital systems often lag behind governance and operational reforms, particularly in publicly funded institutions facing structural and financial constraints (Nadeem, 2024). This gap may affect the long-term sustainability of internationalization efforts, as human resource policies play a central role in capability development and institutional adaptation.

The relatively low standard deviation values across dimensions indicate consistency in perceptions, suggesting that strategic systems are broadly institutionalized rather than concentrated in specific departments. Overall, the results demonstrate that institutional strategies are structurally embedded, reinforcing the view that internationalization in these colleges is driven by governance and system-level alignment rather than ad hoc initiatives.

### Level of Internationalization Practices

Table 4 displays the level of internationalization practices among local colleges in Northern Mindanao in terms of articulated institutional commitment, mobility for teaching and learning, research collaboration, institutional networks, social engagement, governance and leadership, external funding, and institutional investment in faculty.

**Table 4.** Summary of Respondents' Responses on their Perceived Level of Internationalization Practices

Sub-Constructs	Mean	SD	Description	Interpretation
Articulated Institutional Commitment	3.59	1.01	Agree	High
Mobility for Teaching and Learning	2.82	1.08	Neutral	Moderately High
Research Collaboration	3.26	0.93	Neutral	Moderately High
Institutional Networks	3.13	1.01	Neutral	Moderately High
Social Engagement	3.37	0.93	Neutral	Moderately High
Governance and Leadership	3.43	1.08	Neutral	Moderately High
External Funding	2.84	1.12	Neutral	Moderately High
Institutional Investment to Faculty	2.79	1.06	Neutral	Moderately High
<b>Composite Mean</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>0.86</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>High</b>

The overall composite mean of  $M = 3.14$  ( $SD = 0.86$ ) falls within the “Agree” range and is interpreted as High, indicating that internationalization practices are generally present across local colleges in Northern Mindanao. However, the magnitude of the mean suggests that internationalization is moderately developed rather than fully institutionalized across all operational areas.

Among the sub-constructs, Articulated Institutional Commitment recorded the highest mean ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ), indicating that strategic intent and formal commitment toward internationalization are clearly established at the policy level. Similarly, Governance and Leadership ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) demonstrated relatively strong ratings, reflecting visible leadership involvement and institutional positioning in support of global engagement. These findings align with recent higher education management research emphasizing that institutional commitment and leadership alignment typically precede operational expansion in internationalization initiatives (Silva Noro et al., 2024; Clarke & Kirby, 2022).

In contrast, Institutional Investment to Faculty ( $M = 2.79$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) obtained the lowest mean score, followed closely by Mobility for Teaching and Learning ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) and External Funding ( $M = 2.84$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ). These dimensions, interpreted as Moderately High, represent resource-intensive components of internationalization. The comparatively lower ratings suggest structural and financial constraints, particularly in publicly funded institutions where international mobility programs and faculty development require sustained budget allocation. Similar trends have been documented in emerging higher education systems, where strategic commitment often advances more rapidly than funding capacity and international mobility infrastructure (Nadeem, 2024; Arifianti et al., 2024).

The relatively higher standard deviations, particularly in resource-dependent dimensions, indicate variability across institutions, suggesting uneven implementation levels. This pattern reflects differences in institutional capacity, partnership networks, and access to external funding opportunities.

Overall, the findings indicate that local colleges exhibit commitment-driven internationalization supported by governance alignment. However, advancing toward fully operational and sustainable internationalization will require strengthened investment mechanisms, expanded mobility opportunities, and more consistent faculty support structures.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the level of internationalization practices among local colleges in Northern Mindanao. The findings indicate that internationalization practices are generally present and institutionally recognized, though unevenly developed across operational dimensions. Strategic commitment and governance structures appear established, while resource-intensive components such as faculty investment, mobility, and external funding remain comparatively constrained.

These findings reinforce the view that internationalization should not be treated as a peripheral initiative but as an institutional capability embedded within governance and organizational systems. For publicly funded colleges operating under structural and financial constraints, strengthening strategic integration, operational systems, and faculty development mechanisms is critical to moving from commitment-based to outcome-driven internationalization.

By providing empirical evidence from resource-constrained local colleges in a developing regional context, this study contributes to higher education management literature by highlighting the central role of institutional strategy in shaping global engagement. Future research may extend this analysis by looking into the relationships of the variables, and predictive modeling or longitudinal designs to examine how strategic alignment evolves over time and influences measurable international outcomes.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed.

1. *The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and Local Government Units (LGUs)* may use the results of this study as a basis for strengthening localized internationalization policies for local colleges. Since institutional strategies were found to have the strongest association with internationalization practices, policy efforts may focus on enhancing service systems and human resource development mechanisms through capacity-building programs and targeted funding support. CHED and LGUs may also consider developing regional support initiatives that assist local colleges in partnership development, mobility program planning, grant writing, and international benchmarking to promote more inclusive internationalization across institutions.
2. *Local Colleges* may strengthen internationalization by ensuring that it is embedded in concrete institutional systems rather than remaining at the level of formal commitment. Conducting internal assessments to identify gaps in services, human resource practices, and international program structures may help colleges refine their strategies. Given that services and human resources showed strong associations with internationalization practices, institutions may prioritize student mobility support, faculty development programs, and improved administrative coordination for partnerships.
3. *College Administrators, including presidents, vice presidents, and deans,* may enhance internationalization outcomes by integrating international priorities into planning, budgeting, and operational processes. Clear leadership direction, coordinated decision-making, and consistent communication may help translate institutional commitment into measurable outcomes.
4. *The Office of Internationalization Affairs* of the Philippines may use the findings to refine institutional programs by strengthening coordination among service units and human resource offices. Focused initiatives such as mobility readiness programs, faculty mentoring for international

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research, and systematic monitoring of international activities may help improve consistency and visibility of internationalization efforts.

5. *Educators and Faculty Members* may contribute by translating intercultural skills and positive attitudes into practice through teaching, research collaboration, and participation in international activities. Integrating global perspectives into instruction and engaging in professional development related to internationalization may further support institutional goals.
6. Finally, *academics and researchers* may extend this study by conducting regression analysis to determine the predictive strength of institutional strategies, management support, and intercultural competencies on internationalization practices. Such analysis may help identify which variables most strongly explain variations in internationalization outcomes among local colleges. Future studies may also develop and test a context-specific model of internationalization success tailored to local government-funded institutions. Expanding the research to other regions or institutional types and employing longitudinal or mixed-method approaches may further clarify how governance systems and institutional capabilities evolve in support of sustainable internationalization.

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