

Internationalization Practices in Philippine State Universities and Colleges: Assessing Cross-Border Partnerships and Educational Standards

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed internationalization practices related to cross-border partnerships and educational standards among State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Region I, Philippines. It examined five domains of cross-border partnerships and five domains of cross-border educational standards, identified implementation challenges, and formulated a strategic action plan. A descriptive-correlational design was used. Five purposively selected university officials or coordinators directly involved in internationalization initiatives represented the five participating SUCs. Data were gathered through a structured and validated questionnaire and analyzed using frequency count, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Results showed a very high level of implementation for cross-border partnerships (overall mean = 4.75) and cross-border educational standards (overall mean = 4.89). Mobility programs and academic partnerships were the

strongest areas, while research collaboration and scholarly engagement obtained the lowest partnership-domain mean, although it remained highly implemented (mean = 4.36). The manuscript reported that the overall relationship between cross-border partnerships and educational standards was not statistically significant. However, research collaboration and scholarly engagement, as well as internationalization governance, support systems, and quality assurance, showed significant positive relationships with support systems and institutional capacities for internationalization. Selected institutional-profile variables were also significantly related to specific internationalization dimensions. Implementation and compliance problems were generally assessed as moderately serious. The study concludes that Region I SUCs have substantially institutionalized internationalization, but sustained research collaboration, resource allocation, monitoring, and inclusive internationalization-at-home mechanisms require continued strengthening.

Keywords: *internationalization; cross-border partnerships; educational standards; state universities and colleges; Internationalization-at-Home; quality assurance*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions operate within an increasingly interconnected environment in which knowledge, academic mobility, research, and professional standards cross national boundaries. Universities are expected to remain responsive to their local communities while preparing graduates to function in global academic and professional settings. Internationalization therefore extends beyond occasional overseas activities. It involves integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into institutional purpose, teaching, research, governance, and service functions (Knight, 2004; Altbach & Knight, 2007).

In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) formalized this direction through CMO No. 55, series of 2016, which frames internationalization as a strategic component of higher education development. The policy emphasizes mobility, international recognition of qualifications, quality assurance, regional cooperation, and the cultivation of globally competent graduates. It also situates Philippine higher education within ASEAN integration and broader international networks (Commission on Higher Education, 2016).

State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) carry a distinctive responsibility within this agenda. As publicly funded institutions, they must protect access and local relevance while strengthening quality, research productivity, and global competitiveness. Region I hosts five SUCs: Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University, Mariano Marcos State University, Pangasinan State University, the University of Northern Philippines, and Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College. These institutions participate in academic partnerships, mobility initiatives, quality assurance, curriculum enhancement, and research activities that connect local educational priorities with international standards.

Philippine studies have documented growing interest in internationalization, but they also identify persistent limitations in budget, staffing, research capacity, and institutional coordination (Dimasindel & Salam, 2018; Vasquez-Rivera, 2019; San Luis et al., 2023). Existing evidence is largely descriptive or national in scope. Region-specific evidence remains limited, particularly on the relationships among cross-border partnerships, educational standards, and institutional characteristics. This study addressed that gap by assessing the internationalization practices of SUCs in Region I and using the findings as the basis for a strategic action plan.

The study examined the implementation of internationalization practices on cross-border partnerships and educational standards, tested the relationships among the major variables and selected institutional characteristics, assessed implementation challenges, and proposed a strategic action plan to sustain institutional progress.

Literature Review

Internationalization as an Institutional Strategy

Internationalization is a multidimensional process rather than a collection of isolated overseas activities. Knight (2004) emphasized its integration into institutional functions, while Altbach and Knight (2007) described mobility, cross-border programs, and institutional partnerships as major drivers of global engagement. Internationalization can strengthen academic quality and institutional visibility, but it must remain purposeful and connected to local development needs. Philippine policy reflects this strategic approach by linking global engagement with academic standards, regional cooperation, and graduate competitiveness (Commission on Higher Education, 2016, 2022).

Cross-Border Partnerships and Research Collaboration

Cross-border partnerships provide channels for benchmarking, joint programs, mobility, scholarly exchange, and collaborative research. However, the quality of partnerships depends on reciprocity, sustained implementation, and institutional support. International agreements that remain ceremonial have limited educational value. Meaningful partnerships require clear objectives, active monitoring, resource allocation, and mechanisms for translating agreements into research outputs, curricular improvements, and learning opportunities (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Seeber et al., 2016; Haley et al., 2024).

Educational Standards and Quality Assurance

Internationalization is closely connected to quality assurance. Cross-border partnerships can support the comparability of qualifications, recognition of learning outcomes, curriculum benchmarking, and alignment with regional or global frameworks. For SUCs, internationally oriented quality assurance must complement rather than replace national and local educational priorities. Sustainable institutionalization requires governance systems, professional development, data management, and continuous evaluation (Commission on Higher Education, 2022; Teichler, 2017; Bulut-Sahin et al., 2023).

Internationalization-at-Home and Inclusive Global Learning

Internationalization-at-Home (IaH) broadens access to international learning by integrating global and intercultural perspectives into the curriculum, pedagogy, campus activities, and virtual exchanges. It is particularly relevant to public institutions where financial and logistical constraints may limit physical mobility. IaH enables a wider group of students and faculty members to develop global competence without requiring overseas travel (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Jones & Reiffenrath, 2018).

Institutional Capacity and Human Capital Development

Internationalization depends on people and systems. Faculty development, internationally oriented professional training, research support, and dedicated international relations offices strengthen institutional capacity. Human capital investments enhance the ability of institutions to sustain cross-border initiatives and respond to international academic expectations. In Philippine SUCs, leadership, faculty research capability, and organizational support are central to meaningful implementation (Labrador & Alderite, 2020; Wuttaphan, 2017).

METHODS**Research Design**

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component documented the institutional profile of participating SUCs, the level of implementation of internationalization practices, and the seriousness of problems encountered. The correlational component examined relationships between cross-border partnerships and educational standards and determined whether selected institutional-profile variables were related to specific internationalization dimensions. The design was appropriate because the study assessed existing conditions without manipulating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Locale

The study covered the five CHED-recognized SUCs in Region I: Don Mariano Marcos Memorial State University in La Union, Mariano Marcos State University in Ilocos Norte, Pangasinan State University in Pangasinan, the University of Northern Philippines in Ilocos Sur, and Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College in Ilocos Sur. Private higher education institutions and satellite campuses were excluded.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Five respondents were purposively selected, with one key official or coordinator representing each SUC. Participants were directly involved in institutional internationalization initiatives and could include university officials, international relations directors, or designated coordinators. Total enumeration was appropriate because the target group was small, clearly defined, and composed of personnel with direct institutional oversight of internationalization practices.

Research Instrument

A structured survey questionnaire served as the primary instrument. It gathered information on institutional profile; implementation of cross-border partnerships; implementation of cross-border educational standards; and problems encountered in partnership implementation and standards compliance. The questionnaire was adapted from policy frameworks and related instruments cited in the source manuscript. It underwent expert validation and pilot testing, with reliability assessed through Cronbach's alpha using an acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher secured institutional permission and coordinated with the international relations offices or equivalent units of the participating SUCs. The validated questionnaire was distributed through online or printed formats based on respondent accessibility and preference. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw. Responses were coded, screened for completeness, organized, and prepared for analysis.

Data Analysis

Frequency count and percentage were used to summarize institutional profiles. Weighted means described the level of implementation of internationalization practices and the seriousness of implementation problems. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to examine relationships among variables at the 0.05 level of significance.

Ethical Consideration

The study observed voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and data privacy. Respondent identities and institutional responses were handled with care, and the gathered information was used only for academic purposes in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Profile of Participating SUCs

The profile of the five participating SUCs shows that the institutions possessed substantial academic, organizational, and internationalization-related capacity. Most institutions had been established for fewer than 50 years, while all were comprehensive universities with formal internationalization office structures. All five reported AACUP accreditation and participation in WURI, THE, and UI GreenMetric mechanisms. Most institutions had more than 500 faculty members, more than 20,000 students, and more than 100 faculty members with international training, certifications, or mobility experience.

Table 1. *Selected Profile Indicators of Participating SUCs in Region I (n = 5)*

Profile indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Established for fewer than 50 years	4	80.0
SUC Level III	3	60.0
SUC Level IV	2	40.0
Comprehensive university type	5	100.0
With formal internationalization office structure	5	100.0
With more than 500 faculty members	4	80.0
With more than 20,000 students	3	60.0
With more than 100 internationally trained/certified/mobile faculty	3	60.0
With more than 10 internationalization-related PD programs	3	60.0
With more than 100 cross-border partnerships	2	40.0

The presence of formal internationalization offices across all participating institutions indicates that global engagement has moved beyond ad hoc activity toward institutional coordination. At the same time, variations in formal agreements, staffing, and resource capacity suggest that the participating SUCs are not identical in their ability to translate partnerships into sustained outcomes. This supports the view that internationalization must be anchored on coherent policies, adequate resources, and institutional capability (Commission on Higher Education, 2022; Bulut-Sahin et al., 2023).

Implementation of Cross-Border Partnerships

Cross-border partnership practices were rated very highly overall (mean = 4.75). Mobility programs and cross-border learning opportunities obtained the highest mean (4.96), followed by curriculum internationalization and global competence integration (4.88), international academic partnerships and linkages (4.84), and governance, support systems, and quality assurance (4.72). Research collaboration and scholarly engagement obtained the lowest domain mean (4.36), although it remained highly implemented.

Table 2. *Summary of Internationalization Practices on Cross-Border Partnerships*

Domain	Mean	Description
International academic partnerships and linkages	4.84	Very High Implementation
Research collaboration and scholarly engagement	4.36	High Implementation
Mobility programs and cross-border learning opportunities	4.96	Very High Implementation
Curriculum internationalization and global competence integration	4.88	Very High Implementation
Internationalization governance, support systems, and quality assurance	4.72	Very High Implementation
Overall	4.75	Very High Implementation

The results show that the participating SUCs have strongly institutionalized mobility programs and curricular internationalization. Student and faculty exchanges, virtual or blended learning activities, orientation mechanisms, and reintegration processes were perceived as major strengths. These findings are consistent with the growing importance of mobility and digitally supported internationalization in expanding global learning opportunities (Beelen & Jones, 2015; De Wit & Altbach, 2021).

Research collaboration requires particular attention. Although highly implemented, it lagged behind the other dimensions. The source manuscript identified variation in comprehensive administrative, technical, and financial support and in graduate-level opportunities for international co-supervision or joint research. Stronger research support can help convert international linkages into publications, conference participation, innovation outputs, and institutional reputation.

Implementation of Cross-Border Educational Standards

Cross-border educational standards were rated very highly overall (mean = 4.89). Academic mobility programs and international academic partnerships and linkages both obtained perfect means of 5.00. Curriculum and quality assurance alignment received a mean of 4.84, while IaH practices and support systems and institutional capacities each obtained 4.80.

Table 3. *Summary of Internationalization Practices on Cross-Border Educational Standards*

Domain	Mean	Description
Academic mobility programs	5.00	Very High Implementation
International academic partnerships and linkages	5.00	Very High Implementation
Cross-border curriculum and quality assurance alignment	4.84	Very High Implementation
Internationalization-at-Home practices	4.80	Very High Implementation
Support systems and institutional capacities for internationalization	4.80	Very High Implementation

Overall	4.89	Very High Implementation
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The perfect domain means for academic mobility and international linkages indicate strong perceived alignment with international frameworks, recognition of learning outcomes, benchmarking, harmonization of academic standards, and the institutionalization of practices gained through partnerships. These patterns support the argument that international engagement is most meaningful when it contributes directly to curricular quality, academic comparability, and institutional learning (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Teichler, 2017).

IaH practices also emerged as an important mechanism for inclusive access. Participating SUCs reported integrating international and intercultural perspectives into teaching and learning, incorporating global content and multicultural case studies, promoting intercultural campus activities, and using internationalized pedagogy. This approach extends the benefits of internationalization beyond the smaller number of students and faculty who participate in physical mobility.

Reported Relationships Among Variables

The overall relationship between cross-border partnerships and educational standards was not statistically significant. However, specific relationships were identified. Research collaboration and scholarly engagement, as well as internationalization governance, support systems, and quality assurance, demonstrated significant positive relationships with support systems and institutional capacities for internationalization. Selected institutional-profile variables were also significantly associated with particular internationalization dimensions. The manuscript identified year of establishment, accreditation status, institutional population, active memoranda of understanding, and number of cross-border partnerships as relevant variables. Because the detailed correlation table and coefficient values were not included in the visible results section of the uploaded manuscript, the publication article retains the reported significance pattern without adding unsupported statistics.

Table 4. *Reported Significant Relationship Patterns*

Variable or domain	Related variable or domain	Reported result
Research collaboration and scholarly engagement	Support systems and institutional capacities for internationalization	Significant positive relationship reported
Internationalization governance, support systems, and quality assurance	Support systems and institutional capacities for internationalization	Significant positive relationship reported
Year of establishment	Research collaboration and governance dimensions	Significant relationship reported
Accreditation status, institutional population, active MOUs, and cross-border partnerships	IaH practices and institutional capacities	Significant relationships reported
Overall cross-border partnerships	Overall cross-border educational standards	No statistically significant overall relationship reported

These findings suggest that internationalization outcomes cannot be explained by partnership quantity alone. Organizational capacity, research support, governance, and institutional maturity shape the effectiveness of implementation. The results reinforce the importance of strategic management, dedicated offices, professional development, and sustainable support systems (Labrador & Alderite, 2020; Bulut-Sahin et al., 2023).

Problems Encountered in Internationalization

The problems encountered in implementing cross-border partnerships and complying with educational standards were generally moderately serious. The questionnaire covered limited financial resources, bureaucratic delays, unclear policies, staffing and technical expertise, weak monitoring, difficulty identifying mutually beneficial

partners, uneven partnership arrangements, faculty workload, intercultural barriers, regulatory disruptions, curriculum alignment, quality assurance costs, facilities, training opportunities, data management, and institutional commitment.

Table 5. *Priority Areas for Addressing Moderately Serious Challenges*

Priority area	Focus for institutional improvement
Resource sustainability	Financial, human, technical, and logistical resources required for sustained initiatives
Partnership administration	Approval processes, policy clarity, monitoring, evaluation, and credible partner selection
Faculty and staff capacity	Workload, incentives, internationally oriented training, and research support
Quality assurance alignment	Curriculum benchmarking, external accreditation, data systems, and documentation
Inclusive internationalization	IaH practices, intercultural communication, and broader access to global learning

The moderately serious challenges do not negate the very high implementation ratings. Rather, they identify areas where institutions should convert strong activity levels into more sustainable systems. Addressing resource disparities and strengthening monitoring are particularly important because high implementation can be difficult to sustain if partnership outcomes, research outputs, and standards-compliance evidence are not systematically documented.

Proposed Strategic Action Plan

Based on the findings, an eight-area strategic action plan is proposed to enhance and sustain internationalization practices among participating SUCs. The plan prioritizes the conversion of active linkages into measurable educational, scholarly, and institutional outcomes.

Table 6. *Strategic Action Plan for Strengthening Internationalization Practices*

Key result area	Priority actions	Lead units	Expected outcome
1. Partnership portfolio management	Review MOUs and MOAs; classify active, emerging, and inactive partnerships; establish outcome indicators	International relations offices; university leadership	Annual partnership review and evidence-based renewal decisions
2. International research collaboration	Create seed grants, co-authorship support, joint research clusters, and graduate co-supervision mechanisms	Research offices; graduate schools; faculty	More sustained joint studies, publications, presentations, and innovation outputs
3. Mobility and reintegration	Maintain student and faculty mobility while strengthening pre-departure orientation, monitoring, credit recognition, and reintegration sharing	International relations offices; academic units	Mobility experiences translated into curriculum and institutional learning
4. Curriculum and quality assurance alignment	Benchmark programs, learning outcomes, and quality mechanisms against relevant regional and global frameworks	Academic affairs; QA offices; colleges	Improved comparability, recognition, and quality documentation
5. Internationalization-at-Home	Expand virtual exchanges, global case integration, intercultural campus activities, and inclusive global learning opportunities	Academic units; student affairs; ICT units	Wider student and faculty access to international learning

6. Resource mobilization	Develop budget lines, external funding proposals, and shared regional initiatives for internationalization	University leadership; planning; finance offices	More sustainable financial, technical, and logistical support
7. Data, monitoring, and evaluation	Establish an internationalization dashboard for partnerships, mobility, research, standards alignment, and outcomes	International relations offices; MIS; QA offices	Timely institutional evidence for planning and evaluation
8. Capacity development and incentives	Provide training, workload support, incentives, and recognition for internationally engaged faculty and staff	Human resource offices; academic leaders	Stronger institutional participation and long-term ownership

CONCLUSION

The participating SUCs in Region I demonstrated a very high level of implementation of internationalization practices on cross-border partnerships and educational standards. Mobility programs, international academic partnerships, curriculum internationalization, governance structures, and quality assurance mechanisms were strongly embedded across the institutions. The findings indicate that internationalization has become an institutional strategy rather than a peripheral activity.

However, the results also show that sustained internationalization depends on more than the existence of agreements and mobility opportunities. Research collaboration and scholarly engagement require further strengthening, particularly through institutional support, graduate-level collaboration, resource allocation, and monitoring. The reported relationship patterns underscore the importance of governance, support systems, institutional capacity, and selected profile characteristics. The moderately serious challenges encountered by the participating SUCs further highlight the need for strategic resource mobilization, systematic data management, and inclusive IaH practices.

The study contributes a region-specific assessment of Philippine higher education internationalization and offers a practical basis for enhancing cross-border partnerships while protecting educational quality, institutional relevance, and sustainability.

Recommendation

1. Participating SUCs should conduct periodic outcome-based reviews of international agreements to distinguish active and productive partnerships from ceremonial or inactive linkages.
2. Research offices and graduate schools should strengthen international co-authorship, joint research clusters, graduate co-supervision, and seed-funding mechanisms to improve scholarly engagement.
3. International relations offices should maintain strong mobility programs while improving orientation, monitoring, reintegration, and credit-recognition processes.
4. Academic and quality assurance units should continuously align curricula, learning outcomes, and documentation systems with appropriate regional and international benchmarks.
5. Institutions should expand Internationalization-at-Home initiatives so that students and faculty who cannot participate in physical mobility still gain meaningful global and intercultural learning experiences.
6. University leadership should provide sustainable budget lines, staffing, incentives, and data systems to support long-term internationalization outcomes.
7. Future studies should include a larger sample, additional regions, and longitudinal evidence to assess how partnerships influence measurable academic, research, and institutional outcomes over time.

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