

Conclusions: inter-agency cooperation

The comparative overview offered above highlights different approaches to TNE and its QA. These differences raise the question of how it is possible for the international QA community to ensure an effective and efficient oversight of TNE. Cross-border quality assurance of TNE cannot possibly, for the time being, take the form of an international agreed approach. However, there is scope for QA agencies to strengthen cross-border cooperation in the QA of TNE across differences.

A number of recent international initiatives, differently involving agencies mentioned above, have been trying to facilitate cross-border cooperation in a number of ways, including for instance:

- the *Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE) project*, managed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and undertaken by a project consortium including APQN, which developed a Toolkit for strengthening inter-agency cooperation in the QA of TNE
- the Quality Beyond Border Group (QBBG), a KHDSA led initiative aimed at facilitating information sharing between key sending and receiving countries
- and the more recent *Cross-Border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN)*, led by CDGDC aimed at strengthening Europe-Asia cooperation in the QA of TNE

All these recent initiatives share the same goal to helping improve *QA agencies' mutual understanding and therefore build reciprocal trust as a first step towards facilitating cross-border coordination of QA activities*. They demonstrate the shared view that QA agencies should be enablers not inhibitors of quality and relevant TNE, and that key to realising this is growing inter-agency cooperation.

This view is based on the realisation that TNE should not only be seen as an activity posing challenges to QA, but also as an innovative form of HE provision capable to benefit students, societies as a whole, as well as providers. Inter-agency cooperation is a way for QA agencies to respond in effective and efficient ways to the growth of cross-border HE provision.

DEVELOPING AND VERIFYING A CHECKLIST FOR INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMS IN ASIA

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Abstract

Due to the increasing number of international collaborative programs between Japanese universities and universities in other Asian countries, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE) has developed a checklist as a self-evaluation tool for internal quality assurance. The target audience for the checklist was universities in Asia, especially Japanese universities, which have been planning, developing, and running international collaborative programs so far. In order to verify the effectiveness of the checklist, we conducted an online survey. The results indicate that mean scores for "degree of implementation" and "recognition of importance" were high for most items on the checklist. Therefore, it can be inferred that the checklist is considered important and that it will be used to plan, develop, and manage international collaborative programs and as a tool for internal quality assurance.

Keywords

Internal Quality Assurance, International Collaborative Programs

1. Introduction

Quality assurance methodology to assess international collaborative programs

International organizations and networks of quality assurance (QA) agencies, such as, UNESCO-OECD, INQAAHE, APQN, ENQA, issue guidelines related to QA methodology. Similar to the European Union (EU), some projects, such as the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results (MULTRA) and Joint Programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded (JOQAR), are operated by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). Additionally, the Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education (QACHE) project aims to address the quality assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education in terms of information and practical support. As part of the project, a toolkit has been created to provide practical guidance to QA agencies.

There have also been attempts at assuring quality of international collaborative programs in Asia, such as the “Internationalization Award (iAward)” project that focuses on student mobility in Southeast Asia and the “CAMPUS Asia Monitoring” project that identifies good practices in trilateral exchange programs in Northeast Asia. Most of these programs are award credits, and some universities operate programs that award degrees in CAMPUS Asia. In addition, the Working Group on Mobility and QA has created the “ASEAN Plus Three Guidelines on Student Exchanges and Mobility.”

2. Research subjects and method

In order to support and facilitate student mobility and inter-university activities, it is essential to develop a QA procedure that is practical and can be used by universities. Additionally, Asian regions are extremely diverse and distinctive and have different Higher Education (HE) systems. Therefore, there have been attempts to harmonize HE systems in the region with respect to QA, credit transfer, academic calendar, and so on. In view of these changes, the QA methodology for international collaborative programs should be applicable for both degree and non-degree seeking programs. In addition, internal QA may be more realistic and preferable at this time, than an external QA.

Given this context, the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE) began a research project in 2013 to support high quality inter-university activities, especially international collaborative programs, between Japan and other Asian countries, to promote student mobility. The project also aimed to develop a checklist of good practices and recommendations for improvement for those programs. The target audience for the checklist was universities in Asia, especially Japanese universities, which have been planning, developing, and running international collaborative programs so far.

Thus, we attempted to figure out the significance and challenges of international collaborative programs by examining how international collaborative programs have been planned, developed, and administered in the light of quality assurance.

Qualitative research methods such as interviews and document analysis were employed in this study. The documents included previous studies (Takayuki et al. 2012; Sounghee et al. 2012; Carriere and Frederiks 2013; ECA 2013) and reports by CAMPUS Asia Monitoring (NIAD-UE 2014). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with faculty and staff members involved in international collaborative programs and officers to understand how the programs were managed. Fifteen programs from Japanese universities were selected from the “Re-inventing Japan” and other projects, and eight partner universities in ASEAN.

3. Major findings

3.1 Developing an internal QA checklist for international collaborative programs

The major findings of this study are as follows:

(1) The definitions of concepts related to cross-border and transnational education are currently not well established. Although this is distressing, it is a known fact and a cause for concern among researchers and higher education providers. Questions such as – how many “theses” are required to obtain double degrees or how long do students have to study to obtain degrees – abound.

The answers always depend on the definitions of keywords like “thesis,” “degree,” “teaching,” and “internship” that vary across institutions, countries, and academic fields.

(2) Mutual trust is the most important factor among participants including faculty, staff, and students. All collaborative programs have Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) and agreements signed by department heads or university presidents. However, more importantly, successful programs are supported by interpersonal mutual trust. Such trust is usually created through long-standing research collaboration that is especially instrumental in creating successful collaborative graduate programs.

(3) Despite efforts towards shared understanding and mutual trust, there is a chronic imbalance between inbound and outbound student flow. Essentially, there is little authentic reciprocity between universities even in “collaborative” programs. In some programs involving Japanese universities, there are no outbound students altogether, or at best, fewer than inbound students.

(4) Credit transfer systems such as the ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS) and UMAP Credit Transfer Scheme (UCTS) are advantageous and are utilized by some programs. However, others do not use this system. Findings indicate that although credit transfer systems are important, ensuring course content consistency is considered more imperative.

(5) In the context of international collaborative programs, the concept of learning outcomes and their measurement have not received adequate attention. Aside from credit transfer frameworks, not only the equivalence of each subject’s content is difficult to verify but also the equivalence of grading systems. Additionally, most programs have not conducted systematic student surveys or follow-up studies targeting degree or certificate awardees.

Other findings from the research include issues on student support and finance or scholarship. These findings provide the context for selecting the checklist items. The checklist consists of 13 sections with 90 items for Degree Programs (DPs) and 12 sections excluding “Awarding degrees” with 85 items for Non-Degree Programs (NDPs). Many items overlap between DPs and NDPs. Table 1 displays sample items of 13 sections for a checklist.

This checklist is intended as a reference when universities conduct their programs and is not a standard or rule. Simultaneously however, the checklist considers the benefits of student participation.

Table 1. Sample items for a checklist

1. Program Launch Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal system (education, quality assurance) • Selection of partner university with mutual trust
2. Objective and Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting and sharing of clear goal definitions • Protecting students from program discontinuation
3. Academic and Administrative staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sufficient number of qualified academic staff • Promoting faculty and staff mobility
4. Admission and Students selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicit selection criteria and transparency • Balanced student exchange
5. Finance and Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficient budget to achieve the program’s purpose
6. Teaching and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation and recognition of educational content, teaching methods, and education equivalence
7. Student Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination of grading standards and methodologies
8. Credit Transfer and Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding and establishing an appropriate credit transfer and recognition system
9. Support for Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and explicit syllabus and sufficient information about the curriculum and study plan

10. Support for Life and Career Development
• Sufficient information on financial aid and accommodation
• Career support after the completion of the program
11. Measurement and Certification of Learning Outcomes
• Appropriate methods to measure learning outcomes
12. Awarding Degrees (only for DPs)
• Well-defined and sufficient standards and procedures for awarding degrees
13. Internal Quality Assurance
• Monitoring or self-assessment of programs including student feedback

3.2 Verifying the effectiveness of the checklist

We conducted an online survey between November 1 and December 13, 2016 to verify the checklist’s effectiveness. The survey invitation email was sent to the 80 faculty and staff members who attended the “Re-inventing Japan” project advisory meeting. The questionnaire contained six items on respondent’s basic information, four items on international collaborative program objectives (on a five-point scale) and content such as program type, major fields/disciplines, number of inbound/outbound students, and partner institution countries. In addition, it contained a question regarding the “degree of implementation” (on a three-point scale) and “recognition of importance” (on a five-point scale) for each checklist item.

Seven faculty members and 11 staff members responded to the survey. Among the survey respondents, five universities offer double degree programs, four universities offer Twinning programs, while six universities offer Articulation (Fig. 1).

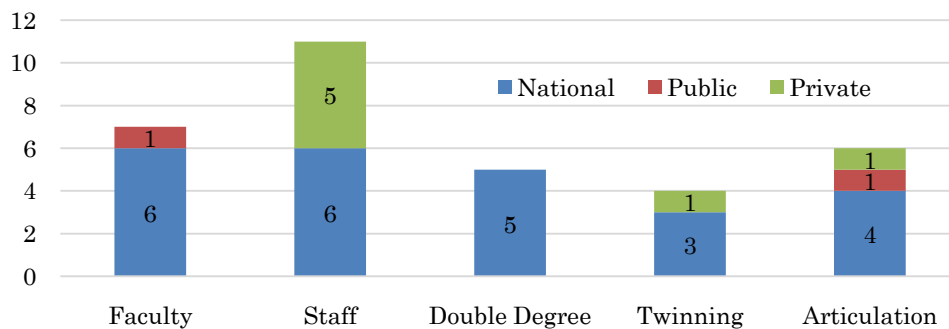


Fig. 1 Faculty/staff and program type by types of university

Of the 18 responses, 12 valid responses were analyzed.

Overall, the lowest mean was nine. Most universities tend not to emphasize promotional activities requiring specific educational research facilities overseas. The mean scores for implementation objectives of international collaborative programs indicate that “double degree programs” scored the highest followed by “articulation” and “twinning programs.” This was due to variability between one university running a doctoral course twinning program placing importance on most elements and other universities. In addition, universities implementing double degrees were inclined to place importance on several items and were ambitious.

Regarding the mean scores of the “CAMPUS Asia programs” and “programs with ASEAN,” generally the CAMPUS Asia program was given more importance than the ASEAN program, but the difference was relatively insignificant (Fig. 3).

However, a significant difference was observed regarding “enhancing the international awareness levels of one’s own university” and “cultivating researchers among one’s own university students who can become active on the international stage” compared to other items. This is because CAMPUS Asia programs included three double degree programs aimed at graduate schools.

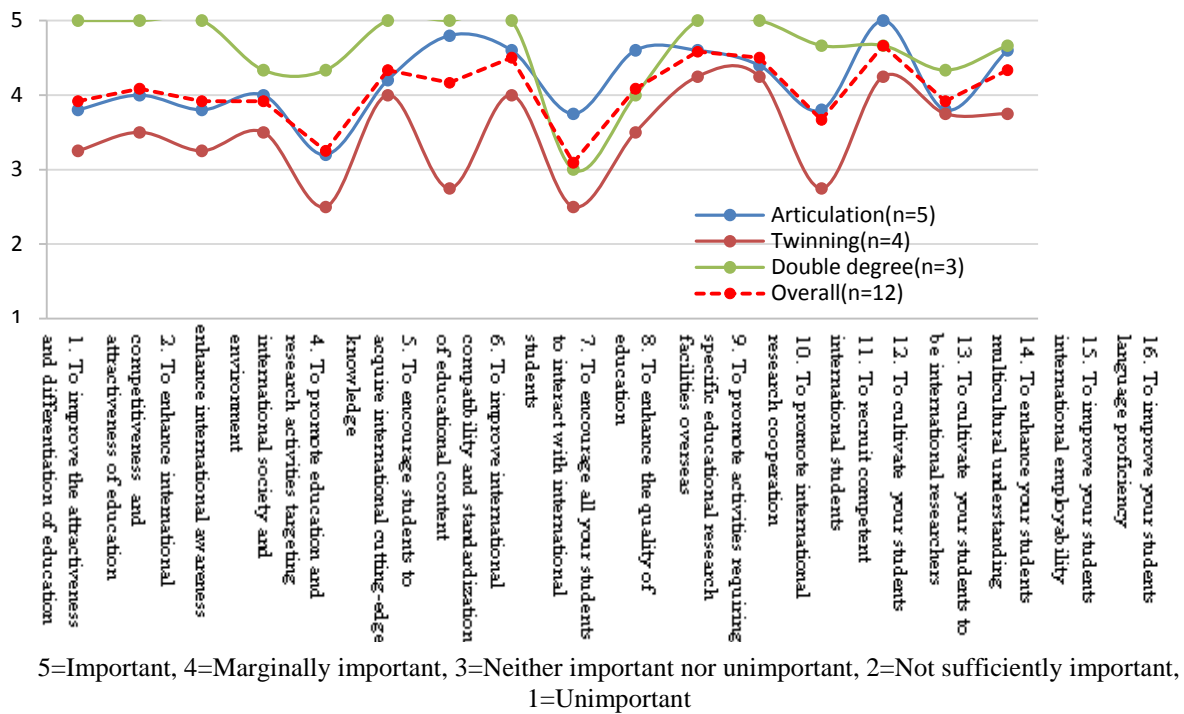


Fig.2 Implementation objective by program type

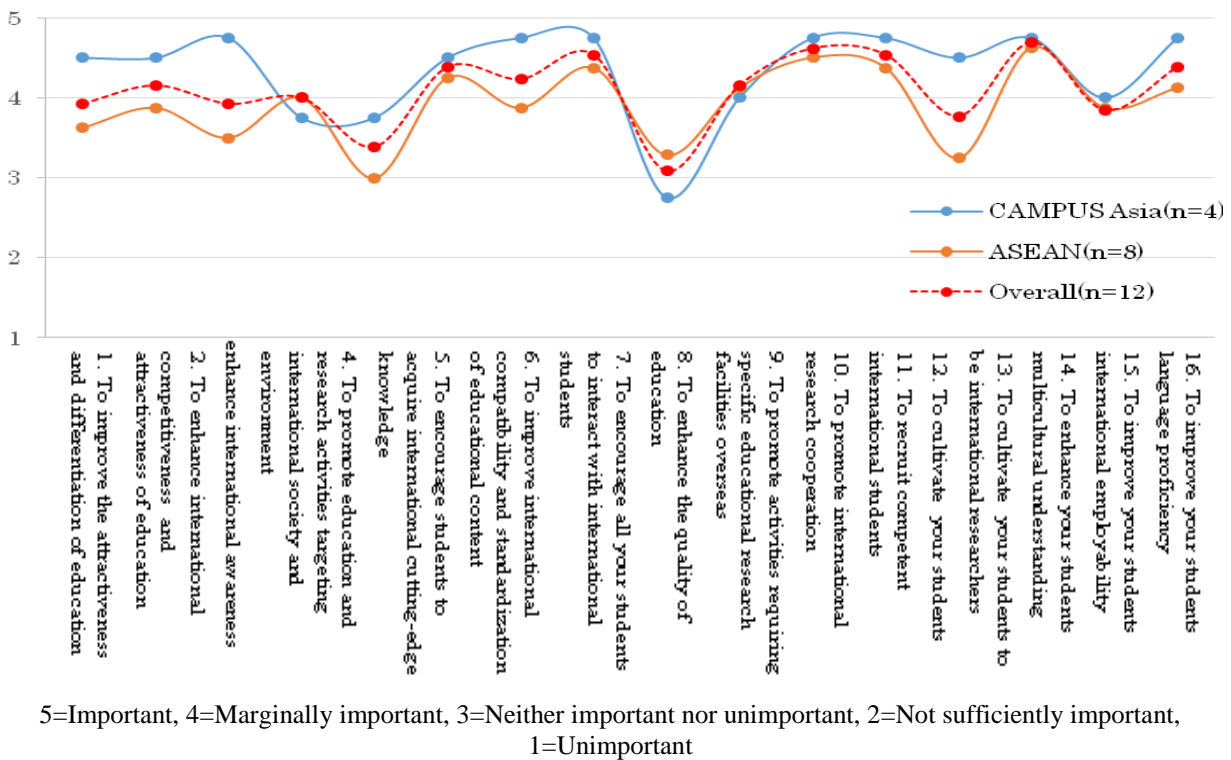


Fig.3 Implementation objective by campus Asia/Asean

Analysis of the “degree of implementation” and “recognition of importance” checklist items scores revealed that both these mean scores were high for most items on the checklist. Meanwhile, Table 2 shows some sample checklist items with low scores for “degree of implementation” although they had high scores for “recognition of importance.” For example, the item “12.8 Have the students who participated in the program been protected if the program concludes or is discontinued for some reason?” had an overall low mean score (1.8) for “degree of implementation.” In contrast, it had a relatively high mean score (4.5) for “recognition of importance.” This implies there is a lack of protection policies against unexpected conditions. Furthermore, the implementation status of

items “16.4 Reviewing the curriculum content,” and “17.1 Ensuring a valid/reliable grading system between partnering institutions” is low.

In addition, the item “23.3 Providing opportunities for student input” and “23.4 Reflecting student input” are related to “internal quality assurance.” Thus, perhaps a regular and continuous improvement approach is required.

Table 2. Average of implementation and importance in checklist

	Degree of implementation				Recognition of importance			
	DD (n=3)	Tw (n=4)	Arti (n=3)	Overall (n=10)	DD (n=3)	Tw (n=4)	Arti (n=3)	Overa ll (n=10)
11.12 Have the methods and challenges of non-degree programs been reviewed while developing the collaborative degree program?	2.7	1.5	2.2	2.1	5.0	5.0	4.4	4.8
12.8 Have the students who participated in the program been protected (e.g., by guaranteed certification validity) if the program concludes or is discontinued for some reason?	2.0	2.0	1.7	1.8	4.3	4.8	4.3	4.5
13.2 Are any incentives being offered to the faculty members participating in program management?	2.3	2.0	1.7	2.0	4.7	3.8	4.3	4.2
16.4 Do the partnering institutions regularly review the curriculum content to ensure the education level does not deteriorate over time?	2.3	1.8	1.7	1.9	5.0	5.0	4.7	4.9
17.1 Is there appropriate coordination between the partnering institutions with respect to their grading standards and methodologies and do they have valid/reliable grading systems?	2.0	2.0	1.7	1.9	5.0	4.5	4.7	4.7
18.4 When appropriate, are any of the existing international framework (ACTS, ECTS etc.) for credits transfers used?	2.0	1.3	1.7	1.6	5.0	4.0	3.7	4.2
19.2 Are the participating students provided the means to view their stage of registration and earned credits?	2.7	1.5	2.3	2.1	4.7	4.3	4.0	4.3
23.3 Does the program regularly provide opportunities for student input? The methods of receiving student input may include questionnaire surveys, informal meetings, and student participation in review committees.	2.7	2.0	2.0	2.2	4.7	4.5	4.0	4.4
23.4 Does the program constantly try to improve itself based on analyses of student input?	2.7	1.7	2.0	2.1	4.7	4.3	4.0	4.3

DD: Double degree, Tw: Twinning, Arti: Articulation

Degree of implementation: 3=Implemented, 2=Only planned not implemented, 1=Not implemented, Recognition of importance: 5=Important, 4=Marginally important, 3=Neither important nor unimportant, 2=Not sufficiently important, 1=Unimportant

4. Conclusion

We developed a checklist for international collaborative programs and conducted an online survey to verify its effectiveness. First, we questioned the implementation objectives of international collaborative programs and analyzed the results. Regarding the overall importance of items, a higher tendency was observed in Double Degree, Articulation, and Twinning programs. Additionally, the CAMPUS Asia programs were higher than the ASEAN programs.

Second, concerning the checklist, it is evident that universities have not implemented them although they recognize their importance. Thus, we can state that the checklist items are perceived as important and could be utilized in planning, developing, and administering international collaborative programs as an internal QA tool.

However, this survey was limited in that it only considers Japanese universities. Additional information and understanding of the calculated data is required. Thus, further work is required not only in terms of this survey’s interview respondents but also in employing this survey to validate partner universities.

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ACADEMIC PROGRAMME DESIGN AND QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES: TRANSFORMATION OF NCPA'S VISION AS A RESULT OF ALIGN TEMPUS PROJECT

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Abstract

In 2013-2017 the National Centre for Public Accreditation (NCPA, Russia) participated in the international ALIGN Tempus project "Achieving and checking the alignment between the academic programmes and Qualifications Frameworks" funded by the European Commission. In cooperation with other Russian partner-institutions the National Centre for Public Accreditation developed the mechanisms ensuring achievement of alignment of academic programmes with the National Qualifications Framework as well as the mechanisms for checking this alignment. NCPA provided methodological support to Russian HEIs in aligning the academic programmes with three groups of standards: the European Standards, the Federal State Educational Standards, and the National Occupational Standards. Revision of academic programmes at three HEIs and pilot evaluation of the developed mechanisms was carried out. NCPA's vision of academic programme design and quality assurance processes has substantially changed as a result of ALIGN project. Academic programmes should be designed, reviewed and evaluated using outcome-based and student-centred approach. During site-visits NCPA combined two different models of external evaluation of academic programmes: the Eastern European model of external review and the Western European model of audit. ALIGN project proves it possible to correlate the National educational standards to the international ones when designing academic programmes.

Key words

Alignment, academic programme, qualifications framework, quality assurance, learning outcomes, assessment mechanisms, external evaluation.

1. Introduction

Rapid changes on the labour market facilitate the increased requirements to competences and professional skills of graduates. Therefore, the requirements to the quality of education and the criteria imposed to this quality are currently more demanding than ever. The alignment between the academic programmes and qualifications frameworks is bound to ensure training of highly qualified personnel, able to perform their functions properly and be competitive on the dynamic world labour market.