HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES OF SKILLS PRODUCTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

There has been a speedy increase in the number of higher education providers, including private higher education institutions in the Philippines. This proliferation of providers and institutional types has given rise to a need to address the issues of skills and relevance in the Philippines. The World Bank (2012) has reported on a significant gap between the skills needs of employers and the levels of skills produced by higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines. How does the Philippines manage the increased demand for higher education to provide skills needed to develop the society and the economy? This article analyses the expansion of higher education globally and in the Philippines, in particular, and its impact on skills production. We argue the case for the proper regulation of the higher education system, in general, and private higher education, in

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particular, to deliver the relevant skills needed for the economic development and global competitiveness of the Philippines.

Keywords: higher education, Philippines, expansion, skills, quality assurance

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades the Philippines has experienced an extraordinary expansion in higher education (Arcelo 2003; Corpus 2003; Clemena 2006). This expansion is evident in the increased number of higher education institutions (HEIs), both in the public and private sectors. The number of public HEIs increased from 226 in 1992 to 643 in 2011. Similarly, the number of private HEIs increased from 862 in 1992 to 1 604 in 2011, making the private higher education sector in the Philippines one of the fastest growing markets in the world. In terms of student enrolments, the number of students enrolled in HEIs increased from 1 549 639 in 1990/91 to 2 726 699 in 2010/2011 (CHED 1990–2011). Of these, 1 690 553 students were enrolled in 2010/2011 in private HEIs (Devensor 2006), showing that growth took place mainly in the private sector.

Similarly, the Philippines is one of four east Asian and Pacific countries (including Indonesia, Japan and Korea) that has more than 70 per cent enrolled students in private HEIs (Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley 2009). However, the challenge facing the Philippines is that the growth experienced in the higher education sector has not been matched by adequate resources to deliver relevant skills (World Bank 2012). Emerging markets require new skills, which higher education is expected to provide (Hendel and Lewis 2005). This article analyses the expansion of higher education globally and in the Philippines, in particular, and its impact on skills production. It argues the case for the tightening of the existing accreditation framework of the higher education system, in general, and private higher education, in particular, in order to deliver the relevant skills necessary for the economic development and global competiveness of the Philippines.

THE GLOBAL EXPANSION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education has been expanding over the past few decades and, according to Altbach et al. (2009), it has struggled to meet demands. Enrolment figures in higher education increased globally from 100 million to 177.7 million between 2000 and 2010 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2012), reflecting an average annual increase in enrolment of more than 7.7 million students over the decade. According to Varghese (2013), the world average in the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in 2010 was 29 per cent, which not only varies across regions, but has also widened over a period of time. For example, the GER varies from 7 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa to 76 per

cent in North America and Western Europe. It more than quadrupled in east Asia and the Pacific (from 7 to 29 per cent), increased to almost three times (from 6 to 17 per cent) in south and west Asia, and more than doubled (from 17 to 41 per cent) in Latin America. What is important to note is that this rapid expansion of the sector very often took place with non-state funding (Varghese 2013).

According to predictions made by Trow (2006), the higher education landscape of 2030 will be 'more' in every way: more institutions, more kinds of institutions, more students and teachers and more diversity among both institutions and participants. Also, economic development in advanced societies will continue to increase the demand for a labour force with more than a secondary school education and reduce the scope and number of occupations that do not require further education. Varghese (2013) attributes this change to an increasing recognition of the economic and social value of higher education, which has contributed to an increased propensity to invest in higher education by public authorities, private corporations and households.

In terms of its economic value, higher education plays an important role in the production and distribution of national income. While the knowledge produced and skills imparted by the sector contribute to faster growth in national income, the expansion of the system contributes to a more equitable sharing of the national income. With the expansion of the knowledge economy, the knowledge produced by the higher education sector and the skills possessed by graduates are becoming deciding factors in promoting economic progress and social welfare (Varghese 2013).

At the very core of the conceptual framework is the idea that higher education is critical in providing high level skills, despite graduates not receiving sufficient skills required by employers to increase productivity in the economy. While it is important to emphasise higher education as an agent of nation building, the economic benefit of higher education is also related to its ability to produce skills needed for a nation's competitiveness (see World Bank 2012). In the Philippines context, competitiveness means that higher education is able to produce graduates with relevant skills to build a quality nation capable of transcending the social, political, economic, cultural and ethical issues that constrain the country's human development, productivity and global competitiveness (CHED 2012).

The heightened demand for higher education is putting pressure on national governments to provide for an increased access now and in the future. In the absence of an adequate response by national governments, opportunities are being created for private providers of higher education to enter this space.

The growth of private higher education worldwide has been one of the most remarkable developments of the past several decades. Today, some 30 per cent of global higher education enrolment is at private institutions (Sharma 2009). According to Altbach (2009), while private higher education has existed for some time in many countries – and has been the dominant force in east Asia countries, such as Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Philippines – it has traditionally been a small sector of

higher education in most other countries. Now, private HEIs, many of them for-profit or quasi for-profit, represent the fastest growing sector worldwide as public funding is reduced and market-based solutions are introduced to allow for private providers.

Goodman (1999) suggests that more people will attend colleges and universities in the 21st century than in all human history. The implication of expansion raises questions about how different nations are prepared in terms of resources and regulatory measures to ensure that the expansion is accompanied by the requisite measures to ensure the quality of the skills needed. A key determinant of skills is the relevance of programmes and curricula offered by HEIs. The quality of programmes needs to be assured by means of a proper and credible accreditation system that sets minimum standards for each programme. Such minimum programme standards point to the nature and form of curriculum standards, and they point to who develops and delivers the curriculum. Kinser and Levy (2006) found that faculty members in private for-profit HEIs are typically weak and deliver the curriculum rather than create it. According to Altbach (2009), newer private universities have, to some extent, redefined the academic profession by concentrating on how the teaching function can best, and least expensively, serve the institutional mission of the universities.

The globalisation of production demands that standardised skills and training meet global standards, irrespective of location. Many of these skills and competencies are developed, predominantly, at the post-secondary level of education. In other words, the knowledge-driven production of goods and services increases the demand for more highly educated manpower. The proportion of employees with higher levels of education is increasing in developed countries that are more knowledge-based than others (World Bank 2002). Post-secondary education is expected to prepare graduates with new skills, a broad knowledge base and a range of competencies to enter a more complex and interdependent world. This article focuses on the role of HEIs (both public and private) in the production of relevant skills for the economy of the Philippines.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND SKILLS PRODUCTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Education in the Philippines is viewed as a pillar of national development and a primary source for social and economic development. As part of a strategy for economic development, the Philippines government uses locally trained people and encourages them to migrate overseas, temporarily, to sell their labour. These exported labourers are encouraged to send their earnings back *via* official channels as a strategy for national development. In 2004 the Central Bank of the Philippines reported total remittances of US$8.5 billion, representing 10 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (WHO 2006). This figure more than doubled in six years to US$18.76 billion in 2010, while still accounting for 10 per cent of the

GDP. The number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) deployed during 2010 was 1 470 826, which was 3.4 per cent higher than the previous year, a figure that represents 4 030 departing migrant workers every single day (POEA Annual Report 2010). If the export of skills and professionals to overseas countries plays such an important role in the economy of the Philippines, it would be strategic and beneficial for the Philippines to ensure that its higher education system has measures to ensure the production of relevant skills for both local and global markets (World Bank 2012).

The World Bank (2012, 15) has identified *Academic skills* that are taught at school and measured by standardized tests; *Generic* or life skills, which can be learned through on-the-job experience, which, generally, include thinking, behavioural and computing skills; *Technical* skills, which are a mix of knowledge and skills to perform specific jobs; and *Cognitive* skills, which are, typically, a combination of academic and thinking skills as paramount to social and economic development. Technical, thinking and behavioural skills are important high skills necessary for professionals and can only be acquired through high-level tertiary education and through on-the-job training skills transfer. Table 1 shows that the Philippines have gaps in producing graduates with high-level information technology skills, technical skills, problem solving skills, work attitude, creativity skills and leadership skills (World Bank 2012, 54).

Table 1: Comparative skills gaps among professionals

	Creativity	Information technology	English	Leadership	Communication	Problems solving	Work attitude	Technical skills	Numeracy/literacy
Cambodia	—			Decision-making		Lack of analytical skills			
Vietnam	—	—		—		—			
Mongolia									
Philippines									
Indonesia									
Thailand									
Malaysia									

Source: Appendix J. (employer and employee survey) (World Bank report 2012). Note: The darker the shade, the stronger the gap (within each country only). Dotted indicates gaps that become less serious, and hashed cells indicates gaps that became more serious in relation to the current demand for skills.

The importance of producing relevant skills points to the need to focus on issues of teaching and learning in HEIs. Holmes (2001) argues that curriculum enhancement is essential in producing graduates with relevant skills. Wright (2001) emphasises the need to prepare students for employment but, at the same time, enhance their learning experience. For students and society, a core aspect of higher education is to prepare graduates for future employment (Aamodt and Havnes 2008). The central idea in this context frames the curriculum as an important element in bridging the gap between what society needs and what higher education produces. Higher education institutions must inculcate the capacity to develop and deliver curricula that respond to societal needs.

The higher education sector in the Philippines produces two major types of skills to build the economy, which can be categorised as 'high-end' or 'low-end' skills. At university or college level, 'high-end' skills are produced in accordance with the provisions or requirements of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) while the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) supervises 'low-end' skills production at various vocational and technical education institutions in the country.

‘Low-end’ skills

Low-end skills require competencies to perform certain tasks related to particular lower level jobs. These jobs include competent caregivers, housekeepers, caretakers, carpenters and plumbers. The POEA (2012) shows that the land-based Filipinos deployed overseas by a major occupational group have significant gaps in the high and low skills produced by HEIs when compared with what the job market actually requires, with the exception of the health sector (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: Number of deployed land-based overseas Filipino workers by major occupational group, New hires: 2008–2012

Major occupational group	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Total	376 973	349 715	341 966	437 720	458 575
Professional, Technical and Related workers	49 649	47 886	41 835	61 598	54 617
Administrative and Managerial workers	1 516	1 290	1 439	4 950	3 241
Clerical workers	18 101	15 403	10 706	14 115	13 960
Sales workers	11 525	8 348	7 242	8 932	9 346
Service workers	**123 332**	**138 222**	**154 535**	**201 512**	**222 260**
Agricultural workers	1 354	1 349	1 122	1 757	1 563
Production workers	39 201	19 608	4 440	3 641	7 140

Source: POEA Compendium of OFW statistics (2008--2012). www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2012_stats.pdf

Table 3: Number of deployed land-based overseas Filipino workers by top ten occupational categories, New hires: 2008–2012

Occupational category	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**
Total	376 972	349 715	341 966	437 720	458 575
Household service workers	**50 082**	**71 557**	**96 583**	**142 689**	**155 831**
Nurses professional	11 489	13 014	12 082	17 236	15 655
Waiters, bartenders and related workers	13 911	11 977	8 789	12 238	14 892
Caregivers and caretakers	10 109	9 228	9 293	10 101	10 575
Wiremen and electrical workers	8 893	9 752	8 606	9 826	10 493
Plumbers and pipe fitters	9 664	7 722	8 407	9 177	9 987
Welders and flame-cutters	6 777	5 910	5 059	8 026	9 657

Labourers/helpers general	9 711	8 099	7 833	7 010	9 128
Charworkers, cleaners and related workers	11 620	10 056	12 133	6 847	8 213
Cooks and related workers	5 791	5 028	4 399	5 287	6 344
Other occupational categories	238 920	197 372	168 782	209 283	207 800

Source: POEA Compendium of OFW statistics (2008--2012). www.poea.gov.ph/stats/2012_stats.pdf

The post-secondary TVET (that is, TESDA-supervised HEIs) has a higher labour market relevance and adaptability than the universities (that is, CHED-supervised HEIs). Despite this development, TVET graduates in the Philippines still need relevant technological advanced fields; are of varying quality; and often need retraining (World Bank 2012, 71). Although in the past there was a high demand for low skills (TVET graduates) in Filipino service workers (see POEA 2008–2012), the current situation demands that the Philippines should produce more high-end skilled graduates to enhance its global competitiveness as the majority of OFW are employed in jobs requiring low-end skills.

'High-end' skills

High-end skills usually require the completion of a minimum of a four-year or five-year degree at a CHED recognised HEIs. Highly skilled workers are considered to include graduates with the ability to apply knowledge in a supervisory role. HEIs are expected to produce graduates with high level skills in critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, communication as well as technical and social skills – all of which are in demand for employment in an era of a knowledge economy and economic development.

Table 4 points to the need to produce more graduates with technical, thinking and behavioural skills. The inability to produce enough graduates with high-end skills and who can function in a competitive market place further suggests the need to examine 'who' develops and delivers the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning in the HEIs.

The shortage in the supply, or low demand, of high-end skills, with the exception of professional nurses (see POEA 2008–2012), can be traced to the inability of the HEIs to deliver curricula that guarantee the production of such skills. De La Harpe, Radloff and Wyber (2000) maintain that in order to better meet the requirements of employers for graduates who are more 'fit for purpose', universities may need to change the existing curricula and how they are taught. Because of strong competition and inadequate funds, many private HEIs cannot develop relevant curricula or provide quality teaching and learning. These are largely the private institutions that are doing it for commercial reasons, which has led to compromising the quality of education in these institutions (see, for example, Tierney 2012). How effective,

then, is the accreditation system in the Philippines? According to Brown (2006), introducing adequate and proper regulatory measures is a possible solution for dealing with this phenomenon. At this juncture, effective accreditation mechanisms can play an important role in ensuring that the relevant curricula, as well as quality teaching and learning opportunities, are provided to meet the needs of both the local and the global economies.

Table 4: Importance of technical, thinking and behavioural skills for professionals

Skills	Vietnam	Cambodia	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Thailand	Mongolia	Average
Technical	7	4	5	7	7	5	5	5.7
Communica-tion	6	5	7	5	5	4	4	5.1
English	5	5	3	4	3	7	7	4.9
Problem-solving	-	7	5	4	6	4	3	4.8
Leadership	-	6	4	4	6	4	4	4.7
Information technology	-	3	4	6	3	6	6	4.7
Creativity	-	-	6	5	4	4	4	4.6
Work attitude	7	5	6	4	4	3	3	4.6

Source: Appendix F. (World Bank 2012 report). Note: Ranking from 0 to 7 of the relative importance of each skill for employers. a) Relates to college graduates. b) Relates to professionals and other skills workers. - = not available.

USING ACCREDITATION TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF SKILLS GAPS

Quality assurance and accreditation, in particular, have become interventions to address the challenges of quality (Mba 2012) and also to ensure that higher education can produce the relevant skills. The questions that need to be answered are: If the majority of graduates from the Philippines lack the requisite skills relevant to the global economy, how do the Philippines manage the increased demand on higher education to provide skills needed to develop the society and the economy? What quality assurance framework is available to regulate the activities of both private and public higher education providers? It is the contention of this article that the answers to these questions lie in a good accreditation mechanism.

ROLES OF THE CHED

In the Philippines the Republic Act 7722, otherwise known as the Higher Education Act of 1994, established the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The CHED has the power and function to

> formulate and recommend development plans, policies, priorities, and programs on higher education which includes grants on education and research, setting minimum standards for programs and institutions of higher learning, monitoring and evaluating the performance of programs and institutions of higher learning (Philippines 1994, 8).

Private HEIs must be established and incorporated as non-stock or as stock educational corporations with the Security and Exchange Commission (SEC) (Sarmiento III 2008). However, the certificate of incorporation is not an authority or a licence to operate a higher institution or a permit to operate higher education programmes in the Philippines. As part of the statutory mandate, the CHED has set minimum requirements that private HEIs must meet before a 'permit' or 'recognition' to operate academic programmes is issued. The issue of a 'permit' or 'recognition' by the CHED means that the institution has complied with all the requirements, which include the following:

1. Filled in, and submitted, a relevant application form;
2. Provided the name approved by the SEC and the location of the institution or college;
3. Provided the names and addresses of all officers, directors, governing boards and faculties;
4. Stated the total amount of money actually invested and all other information relative to the financial condition of the institution or college;

5. Described the building occupied or to be occupied with full details regarding the number and dimensions of the rooms, plumbing and sanitary arrangements and facilities for proper lighting and ventilation;
6. Submitted a list of required teachers and assistants, showing their academic degrees, profession, experience and qualifications and the subjects to be taught by each;
7. Provided information concerning the curriculum to be established; and
8. Given full information relative to laboratories, equipment and libraries (*Sarmiento III 2008: Article V, Section 20 of the Manual of Regulations for Private Higher Education 2008*).

These requirements point to the concern government has to issues of quality in teaching and learning. The need for provision of the CVs of academic and administrative staff, concerns about the need to know their experiences, qualifications and courses to be taught, further indicate the desire to have well qualified people to be employed by these institutions. The need for laboratories, equipment and libraries shows the quest to have appropriate facilities for teaching and learning. In particular, the CHED's requirement concerning the curriculum is to ensure that approved institutions respond to the needs of the economy. Therefore, the CHED devotes 70 per cent of the undergraduate curriculum to developing thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, communication, technical and social skills (CHED 2012).

A permit may be issued upon compliance and renewed annually if compliance is continuously observed. 'Recognition', on the other hand, is the confirmation that an institution has completely complied with all the requirements and has continuously adhered to CHED standards for a particular programme being offered. These institutions are still required to apply for 'special order' numbers from the CHED for all their graduates, except if they have been granted deregulation or Level IV accreditation status (internationally competitive programmes that are eligible for grants and autonomy from government supervision and control). Special order numbers authenticate the degrees awarded by private HEIs. The process of securing special order numbers includes the submission of the list of candidates for graduation to the CHED and other requirements, such as the list of enrolments and copies of theses in case of postgraduate studies.

In 2009 alone, the CHED reported a total of 1 252 permits/recognition certificates that were issued by the regional offices to private HEIs (CHED 2009). The greatest concern then is, if the majority of HEIs, private institutions in particular, have been producing graduates without requisite skills, how then do they manage to get licence/permits or recognition to operate from CHED? Therefore, compliance with CHED requirements on programme registration will further depend on continuous monitoring and continual improvement of HEIs, which can be achieved through the relevant accreditation system.

ACCREDITATION SYSTEM IN THE PHILIPPINES

There are two major types of accreditation in the Philippines: government registration of programmes and private accreditation. The registration of programmes is done by the CHED and involves the issuing of a government permit to offer curricular programmes to the private HEIs in the form of a permit or recognition. Public HEIs, otherwise referred to as State Universities and Colleges (SUC), do not require this kind of permit from the CHED to offer curricula programmes. SUCs design curricula, offer programmes and award degrees to qualified candidates in accordance with their Charter, while private accreditation is voluntary and done by the independent private accrediting agencies. It is a process for assessing and upgrading the educational quality of HEIs and programmes offered by HEIs in the country (CHED 2005).

Similarly, voluntary accreditation refers to the process whereby an institution chooses either to apply for a certificate of accreditation from an accrediting agency or not to apply and remain unaccredited. Voluntary accreditation focuses on self-study, self-evaluation and the continuing improvement of educational quality (Mantiza 2013). The certificate of accreditation attests to the fact that the quality of an institution's educational programmes and operations *exceed* the minimum standards set by the CHED (Sarmiento III 2002).

Five different accreditation agencies have been established in the Philippines:

- Philippines Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities (PAASCU);
- Philippines Association of Colleges and Universities – Commission on Accreditation (PACU-COA);
- Association of Christian Schools and Colleges – Accrediting Agency (ACSCU-AA);
- Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (AICUCOA); and
- Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP).

FAAP is the umbrella organisation of the accrediting agencies (PAASCU, PACU-COA and ACSCUAA) authorised to certify the accredited status of academic programmes offered by private institutions. Similarly, the accredited status of public institutions is certified by the umbrella organisation of accrediting agencies (AICUCOA and AACCUP) network of the National Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (NNQAA).

Each agency has its own accreditation criteria, processes and instruments and its own accreditors. However, the scope of institutional reviews, based on the areas covered by the standards, is almost identical for all of them. Although accrediting

agencies do not derive their authority from the state, the government relies on them to establish eligibility in terms of various forms of funding and in awarding deregulation status, autonomy and grants (Sanyal and Matin 2007).

The benefits for the different accreditation levels are as follows:

- Level I – partial administrative deregulation;
- Level II – full administrative deregulation, financial deregulation in terms of setting tuition and other fees, partial curricular autonomy, authority to graduate students without prior approval of CHED and without need for Special Orders, priority funding assistance, priority for government subsidy for faculty development, right to use on its publications or advertisements the word, 'ACCREDITED', and limited visitation/inspection and/or supervision by CHED;
- Level III – all the benefits for Level II and full curricular deregulation; and
- Level IV – all the benefits for Levels II and III, award of grants/subsidies from the CHED's Higher Education Development Fund (HEDF), and grant of charter or full autonomy (CHED 2008).

Accrediting agencies focus mainly on programme-based accreditation that addresses curriculum issues, the teaching/learning process and institutional management issues, which impact on academic programmes (Devensor 2010). The major steps in the accreditation process are as follows: (1) institutional self-survey or self-evaluation; (2) preliminary visit (four to six months after the start of self-survey); (3) formal survey visit (a minimum of six months after preliminary visit); and (4) decision by governing board of accrediting agency. Programme accreditation status is classified on Levels I to IV.

- Level I – Programmes that have undergone a preliminary survey and are certified as being capable of acquiring accredited status within two years;
- Level II – Programmes that receive full administrative deregulation and partial curricular autonomy;
- Level III – Programmes that receive full curriculum deregulation; and
- Level IV – Internationally competitive programmes that are eligible for grants and autonomy from government supervision and control (Clemena 2006).

The accreditation classification used in the Philippines means that the global competitiveness of the nation depends on the HEIs achieving quality standards in line with Level IV for internationally competitive programmes in order to produce high-level skills. However, there are very few HEIs with Level IV programme accreditation status. For instance, as of 6 November 2012 only 8 out of 148 members of private

HEIs were granted Level IV programme accreditation by the PACUCOA for private HEIs, as certified by FAAP. The number of institutions with a capacity to bridge the skills gaps is very small, considering the Philippine population of 98 734 798 (NSO 2013) with a ratio of 1 institution for every 66 000 people and the necessity to supply high-skills workers for economic development. Similarly, as of 31 December 2012 the AACCUP had assessed an aggregate number of 2 887 institutions for programmes accreditation and two institutions for institutional accreditation in the public higher sector. A total number of 861 academic programmes were accredited in 81, or 73.64 per cent, of the 110 SUC in the country. However, only six programmes (0.70 %) qualified for Level IV accreditation and only one institution has Level IV accreditation with five programmes, accredited to it in 2012 (AACCUP 2013).

In another way, the statistics show the robustness of the accreditation system in the Philippines in that it is difficult to obtain the highest level accreditation status and that only the best institutions get it. However, most countries would ensure that institutions' programmes are accredited in order to issue a licence to operate academic programmes.

PROBLEMS OF ACCREDITATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

The challenges of accreditation in the Philippines may be characterised as falling into the following two categories, namely: (a) Programme accreditation and (b) institutional accreditation. Accreditation of programmes and institutions is voluntary in the Philippines.

Programme accreditation

Programme accreditation refers to the evaluation of the individual programmes of a HEIs. In the Philippines context it focuses attention on a particular academic course to determine whether the external accreditation standards are met (Sarmiento III 2008).

Since programme accreditation is voluntary, private HEIs may begin to recruit and admit students to a programme as soon as the CHED grants a permit to offer the curricular programme. As a result, there is a risk that this process of programme registration and fulfilling the CHED criteria may lead to what Kis (2005) calls dramaturgical compliance to the requirements of the system, instead of quality improvement, and it may, possibly, become an exercise in just fulfilling government requirements. There is a tendency that, after receiving 'permits' or 'recognition' to offer a programme, these institutions may stop complying with quality measures since accreditation to check continual improvement is not compulsory. Consequently, it has contributed to the over-population of private HEIs in the Philippines that are not properly quality-assured to offer quality programmes, and this has affected the calibre of the graduates they produce.

Institutional accreditation

Institutional accreditation is the highest status that can be awarded to deserving private or public HEIs in the Philippines. Institutional accreditation refers to the evaluation of the whole educational institution whose guidelines and standards are formulated in collaboration with the existing federations/networks of accrediting agencies and are approved by the CHED (CHED 2005). According to Sarmiento III (2008), institutional accreditation takes into consideration the characteristics of the whole establishment and assesses it as a total operating unit. In this case, the accrediting agency evaluates not only the academic courses but also the students' personnel services, financial resources, administrative strength, building and sites and the faculty and its support personnel, among others (Sarmiento III 2002). At present, in embracing institutional accreditation only nine universities have been granted this accreditation in the Philippines. Only one university has been simultaneously granted both Level IV status and institutional accreditation (see Wikipedia 2013). The number of institutions with institutional accreditation is small considering the growing numbers of students seeking access to higher education and given the need to produce high-level skills for the competitiveness of the Philippines. These problems can be traced to the fact that accreditation is voluntary.

In view of the afore-mentioned, accreditation could be viewed as a good strategy to address issues of skills gaps. However, it could also result in a lack of productivity if the reasons behind its implementation are not clear. The contextual factors of higher education vary from country to country and accreditation practices also depend on objectives. For instance, the objective of accreditation in the Philippines should be to strengthen HEIs to produce quality graduates with relevant skills for nation building and to enhance its global competitiveness. This objective should inform the mechanisms and types of accreditation (voluntary or compulsory accreditation system) to be put in place, including the criteria to be set and the instruments to be used for measuring quality. The accreditation criteria in the Philippines should highlight key quality indicators that the curriculum should meet for the government and HEIs to achieve their mandate of producing quality graduates with relevant skills for the economy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has provided an overview of the global context of the expansion of higher education and the need to produce relevant skills in the Philippines. The analysis has demonstrated that the global expansion of higher education has been accompanied by the emergence of problems of quality and relevance. The failure to deploy more resources commensurate with the expansion of higher education has led to undermining the production of quality graduates for national development and the global competitiveness of the Philippines. Existing quality assurance mechanisms

and accreditation systems in the Philippines do not match their context, nor are they relevant in addressing the needs of Filipino society to be globally competitive. This situation has encouraged the emergence of many non-accredited private higher education providers.

The voluntary and programme-based accreditation systems in the Philippines are not adequate to address the current challenges of quality – given the option and choice afforded institutions to either apply for accreditation or not to do so. For instance, voluntary accreditation creates room for the HEIs to escape quality measures, which could be a contributing factor to the production of a high number of graduates without the requisite skills. In this regard, this article has argued for, and is recommending, the tightening of the regulatory framework in order to address issues of quality and, particularly, the skills gap.

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