

A Tracer Study on the Graduates of the Blended Education Programs for Foreign Students of a University in Ilocandia

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Abstract

A tracer study is essential as a way of understanding the quality and relevance of programs offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as well as the labor market. This study determined the status of graduates of the blended education programs for Thais of the University of Northern Philippines (UNP). A great number of the respondents completed Doctor of Public Administration, majority are employed and occupy middle level positions in the Thailand government and are receiving high monthly salaries. The self-confidence, competence, honor and prestige of the respondents significantly improved upon completion of a doctorate degree. The respondents are highly satisfied on the curriculum and faculty but have low satisfaction on school facilities. Their main concern is the lack of good accommodation within the campus and the non-recognition of the degree by the Board of Education of Thailand. In light of the findings, the school facilities must be upgraded to meet global standards. Internet should be made accessible and in-campus accommodations should be improved. The university should make representation with the Board of Education in Thailand for the recognition of the university blended programs. Finally, the faculty should further improve the quality of instruction to make the programs more attractive to foreign students.

Keywords: *public administration, thai graduates, evaluation*

INTRODUCTION

Aligned with the objective of Education 4.0 which is a technology driven design that would help administrators, teachers and learners to transform education in the modern times, all academic institutions must be accountable for the quality of services they provide. The universities or schools must assure those who are impacted by their programs/services that the commodities (graduates) they produce are at par with or have even exceeded minimum expectations. One of the most common ways of determining whether graduates of a certain academic program, indeed, met or exceeded expectations is the conduct of a formal inquiry into their present status and comparing the same to their prior conditions.

The University of Northern Philippines (UNP), a state funded educational institution needs to demonstrate that it is capable of doing what it purports to do as enunciated in its goals--to develop effective leaders in education, government, business, industry and other fields. The people who shoulder the bulk of the costs of education in state colleges and universities are entitled to know whether the people's taxes are used efficiently in meeting the needs of their constituents.

The Doctor in Public Administration (DPA), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) and Doctor of Education (Ed.D) programs must show evidence that these are viable programs worthy of funding. The DPA and DBA were initially offered in the early 1990s while Ed.D was among the initial offerings when graduate education in UNP started in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, many Thai students enrolled in the Ed.D programs where they had to attend regular classes in the classrooms. Consequently, the students were relocated to Vigan during the duration of their study. When DPA and DBA were offered, many Thais also enrolled in these programs. Due to the advances in technology, the programs recently employed a variety of instruction interventions. Subsequently, the modular mode of delivering instruction was conceptualized and adopted by the Graduate school under its special program for Thai students. Under this program, topics/subjects were no longer discussed only within the confines of the classrooms. The Thais are no longer required to spend whole semesters or years in UNP to finish a degree. Instead, modules were given upon enrollment which the students have to read and perform the exercises required. They only come once or twice in a semester for the lecture portion. When the use of the Internet became a fashion, it was utilized to interface with the students in addition to the conventional methods. The activities, when summarized, is equivalent to 54 hours, thus, complying with required minimum number of hours. Moreover, it is supplemented by off campus sessions wherein the faculty sometimes travelled to Thailand to meet students. With the various methods adopted in delivering instruction, the special program was eventually given a new nomenclature, thus, blended education was used to appropriately reflect the very nature of the program. This is confirmed by Republic Act 7722, CHED Memorandum Order (CMO) No. 62 Series of 2016, on Policies, Standards and Guidelines (PSGs) for Transnational Education (TNE) Programs. It is stated in Article II No. 6 that Blended Learning is a mode of educational delivery that combines distance education, include online, with traditional classroom-based education. It is remarkable to note that recently, the UNP programs evolved to include students from Vietnam but were not included as respondents in this study.

Initially, many people were doubtful of the effectiveness of the blended program. However, many studies showed that this alternative method of instruction tend to be even better than the traditional classroom method. In a study conducted by Eryilmaz (2015) in Atilim University, Ankara, Turkey, the students expressed that they learn more effectively in a blended learning environment. Likewise, Khan et al. (2012) underscored the advantage of the blended learning process when they stated that "the

overall learning as well as the teaching experience is considerably enhanced by covering negative aspects of the traditional approach. In the health sector, a study conducted by Kiviemi (2014) on the effects of blended learning approach on students outcomes in a Graduate level public health course found out that there was a significant increase in students performance under the blended learning approach. Moreover, the students preferred the blended approach than the traditional method. In UNP, the increased trust in the blended education is evident with the rise in the number of graduates under the blended programs.

As of March 2015, there are 318 Thais who completed doctoral degrees dominated by the DPA graduates with 135 followed by the Ed.D. with 132 and the least is DBA with 51.

It should be noted that DBA was offered during the school year 2004-2005, thus, the first batch graduated in school year 2007 - 2008. The figure shows that there are school years when nobody graduated from some programs.

Many of the students are employed under the Thai government. Most of the Ed.D. graduates are connected with the Ministry of Education either as teacher supervisors or faculty of government owned universities/colleges, while a great number of the DPA graduates are connected with other government institutions like the police department and local government units. On the other hand, most of the DBA graduates are either with the private sector or engaged in their own personal businesses.

Considering the number of years since the inception of these Graduate programs, a program evaluation study would be beneficial. Program evaluation is “the use of social science research methods by evaluators, administrators or practitioners to assess the planning, implementation or outcome of social programs” (Smith, 1990:15). The results can reveal practical information such as good educational decisions, wasteful procedures or the necessity for the introduction of a new program (Smith, 1990). An evaluation can also identify weak spots and address financial concerns (Krause, 1996). It can, likewise, generate vital data which would be helpful in program revision and enhancement. Orejana and Ressurreccion (2010) in their study on Bachelor of Science in Business Administration Program Tracer Study mentioned that results of the investigation indicate that 91 percent of the graduate respondents are employed, with 20 percent holding supervisory positions and four percent holding managerial positions. Topics covered by the programs resulted to be a strength in the aspect of curriculum as supported by 45 percent of the respondents while lack of applications and exposures came out as the main weakness as indicated by 29 percent of the respondents. Likewise, the first recommendation was to have more exposures and applications as expressed by 45 percent of the respondents.

This current study will help the university particularly those involved in the administration of the blended programs. The findings may be used as basis in the formulation of guidelines to further improve the program. Moreover, it can be used as baseline information for policy decision in the university.

According to Owen and Roberts (1999), there are three levels of program assessment namely: mega, macro and micro. A macro assessment deals with an entire organization or corporation and what is typically looked into is the program's social and economic impact to the state. A macro assessment, on the other hand, is narrower in scope as it deals only with one branch of a corporation. In the case of a university, only one campus would be the focus of the study. In the absence of other campuses, the focus of assessment could be limited to one division or department.

In micro-level studies, units or individual programs are the subjects of evaluation. Specific courses within a program can, likewise, be evaluated. The evaluation can demonstrate teaching effectiveness, student outcomes or how funds are being used.

The stakeholders in each level of evaluation are different. Likewise, the areas of concern vary with each level. However, the general goal is to demonstrate the value or worth of what is being evaluated.

This proposed study is a micro evaluation of the UNP Graduate Studies Blended Program in Doctor of Business Administration, Doctor of Public Administration and Doctor of Education using student outcomes as the measure of assessment.

This research endeavor aimed to determine the status of the graduates of the blended education programs of the university. Specifically, it sought to determine the profile of the Thai graduates after completing their doctoral degree, find out the extent to which the program enhanced their self-confidence and competence, determine the level of satisfaction of the respondents on school related factors, identify problems encountered by the respondents during the process of completing the program; and solicit feedback and recommendations from the graduates on how the programs can be further enhanced to be more attractive and student friendly.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the descriptive survey method of research. The subject of the study are the Thais who completed doctoral degree in UNP through the blended education program. The target number of respondents is 30 percent (or 94) of the total number of graduates (318) since the program was initiated. However, only 52 responded due to the difficulty of tracking them based on the incomplete address they wrote in the enrollment forms. They were identified from the list of graduates available

at the Registrar's Office. Purposive and convenient sampling were used wherein graduates located based on the address written in the students' records were taken as respondent. The graduates contacted then referred the researcher to other graduates known to them. A questionnaire checklist was used in data gathering. It was supplemented by personal interview by the researcher with the respondents. The gathered data were then tabulated and analyzed through the use of statistical tools such as frequency and percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found out that a great percentage (23 or 44.23%) of the Thais who pursued doctoral degrees in the University of Northern Philippines are holders of a masters degree in public administration. The least (11 or 21.15%) completed MBA or Master in Business Administration. A great number (24 or 46.15%) of the respondents are graduates of the Doctor of Public Administration program although, based on records of the Registrar office, the Ed.D. graduates outnumbered those who completed the DPA program. The least (9 or 17.31%) are those who finished the DBA degree which is the newest program under the blended education of the university.

Majority (39 or 75%) of the respondents are employed in Thai government while the least (5 or 9.61%) are self-employed having their own business companies. Majority (34 or 65.38%) occupy middle level positions which tend to imply that many of the respondents have been promoted after completing a doctoral degree. Only a few (12 or 23.08%) occupy executive level positions.

Majority (36 or 69.23%) of the graduates of the blended program are receiving salaries ranging from 41,000 to 50,000 Bhat monthly. Probably these are the graduates occupying middle level positions. Only 13 (25%) enjoy salaries of 51,000 or more Bhat per month. This finding tends to manifest that most of the graduates are now earning high income as compared to what they used to earn.

In terms of confidence building, majority (28 or 53.84%) of the respondents said that their self-confidence increased very much while only a few (7 or 13.46%) mentioned that there was no improvement at all in their self-confidence after completing the doctoral degree. Similarly, majority (33 or 66.46%) of the respondents believe that completing the doctoral degree enhanced their skills, knowledge and professional competence. The least (4 or 7.69%) said that their professional competence, skills and knowledge did not improve after acquiring a doctoral degree. On whether the degree they acquired enhanced their leadership capacity, majority (27 or 51.92%) of the respondents answered that the degree helped them very much to be effective leaders. The least (8 or 15.38%) said that the degree did not at all enhance their leadership abilities. With respect to prestige, majority (38 or 70.08%) of the

graduates agreed that completing the degree has increased their prestige very much while only three (5.77%) said it did not increase at all.

In terms of influence, a great number (21 or 40.38%) of the graduates said that they did not become influential after obtaining the degree while the least (12 or 23.08%) said that finishing the degree helped them very much in influencing others.

As to whether the respondents will recommend to other Thais the UNP blended program, great majority (41 or 78.85%) said that they “strongly recommend” while only four (5.77%) do not recommend the program. Those who do not recommend the program are most likely the graduates whose doctoral degrees are not related to their work, hence, they found no relevance of the blended program.

In terms of satisfaction of the respondents on school-related factors, the following were observed: a. on course content of the curriculum - majority (32 or 61.54%) of the graduates said that they are highly satisfied while only 6 (11.54%) have low level of satisfaction; b. on relatedness of the contents to their line of interest or field of specialization, majority (36 or 69.23%) have high level of satisfaction. Only seven (13.46%) have low level of satisfaction along this area. These, may be, are the graduates whose MA degree are not related to the doctoral degree that they pursued. c. on the time allotted for each subject, a great number (21 or 40.38%) of the respondents have very high level of satisfaction while 15 (28.85%) said that they are not satisfied; d. on the course requirements, majority (39 or 75%) have very high level of satisfaction while only three (5.77%) have low satisfaction level; e. on whether the modules are easy to understand and the contents are appropriate to the subjects – majority (31 or 59.62%) of the graduates have very high level of satisfaction along this aspect while only 8 (15.38%) have low level of satisfaction.

Along faculty, the respondents were asked to describe their level of satisfaction along four items namely: mastery of the subjects taught or faculty explain the topics well, the faculty are approachable, and requirements are realistic. On mastery of subjects taught or faculty explain the topics well, great majority (41 or 78.85%) of the respondents have very high level of satisfaction which tends to imply that the graduates were contented with the way the faculty managed their subjects. Only two (3.85%) have low level of satisfaction. This may be attributed to the fact that there are some students who have communication difficulty and can hardly understand specially if the teacher explains fast. Likewise, a great majority (46 or 88.46%) of the graduates are highly satisfied on the approachability of the faculty while only two (3.85%) have low level of satisfaction along this item. On whether requirements are reasonable, great majority (42 or 80.77%) are very highly satisfied while only three or 5.77 percent have low satisfaction level. This tends to indicate that the graduates are contented with what the faculty asked them to submit as requirements of their subjects.

On classroom cleanliness, a great number (25 or 48.08%) of the respondents have low level of satisfaction which tends to imply that many are not contented with the classrooms they used while studying in the university. Only 12 (23.08%) said that they are very highly satisfied with the cleanliness of the classrooms. Likewise, majority (29 or 55.77%) of the respondents have low level of satisfaction on the state of the comfort rooms implying that there is much to be done to make these facilities clean and comfortable to the students. Only 4 (7.69%) of the respondents are very satisfied with the state of the comfort rooms.

On the conduciveness of the classroom for learning, majority (34 or 65.38%) of the respondents have high level of satisfaction along this aspect. This may be so because the best classrooms in the Graduate school building are usually reserved for students of the blended programs. Moreover, there are no distractions as the rooms are exclusive for their use and insulated from the traffic noise outside. Furthermore, it is just a few minutes ride from the hotel where they usually stay when they come for the campus-based sessions. The least (7 or 13.46%) have low level of satisfaction which tends to imply that only a few are not contented with the kind of classrooms that they used while enrolled in the university.

With respect to the availability of “free wifi” in the classroom, majority (38 or 73.08%) have low level of satisfaction. This can be attributed to the fact that the classrooms are not provided with free “wifi”. Only three (5.77%) of the respondents were very satisfied. Apparently, these are the students whose cellphones have internet connections, thus, they are not affected by the absence of “wifi” in the classrooms.

On problems encountered, only a few answered this portion of the questionnaire and the concerns raised are: the absence of a good accommodation in the campus which compelled the respondents to stay in hotels outside making it more expensive and inconvenient; the lack of wifi in the classrooms which make it difficult for them to search for data needed to comply with the requirements of the subjects; and one mentioned the non-recognition of the degree he acquired here by the Board of Education of Thailand.

Lastly, on recommendations to improve the blended programs of the university, only one respondent suggested for the upgrading of the enrolment system so that foreign students may enroll on- line.

CONCLUSIONS

A great number of the products of the blended programs finished Doctor of Public Administration. Majority occupy high positions in the government of Thailand, have permanent employment status and earning income ranging from 41,000-50,000 bhat a month. The blended program is highly recommended by the graduates to other

Thais intending to pursue a doctoral degree. Acquiring a doctoral degree has enhanced the prestige, self-confidence, competence and influence of the respondents. The respondents are very satisfied on the curriculum and quality of faculty of the blended programs of the university. Majority of them, however, are not satisfied with the school facilities particularly the state of cleanliness of the classrooms, comfort rooms and the lack of internet connections (wifi) in the classrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings and conclusions, there is a need to upgrade the school facilities particularly classrooms and comfort rooms to meet global standards. This includes the provision of internet access to the classrooms used when foreign students come for the campus based sessions. Accommodation facilities in the campus including the quality of service should be improved so that the students enrolled in the blended programs do not need to stay elsewhere. The university should consider proper representation with the Board of Education of Thailand for the recognition/accreditation of the UNP blended programs.

The faculty involved in the blended programs should maintain or further improve the quality of instruction to enhance its integrity and make it more attractive to foreign students.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researcher extends his most sincere gratitude to the University of Northern Philippines particularly the University Research Office for the financial support that made the completion of this endeavor possible.

