



INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGE OPTIMIZATION: “AN AIDE IN COMBATING EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES AMIDST THE PANDEMIC”

By

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Abstract:

Institutional linkage optimization an aide in combating educational challenges amidst the pandemic consider some elements useful in sustaining academic goals such as Industry counterparts reveal that different sets of partners are at "par" with each other, hence, it is suggested that the institution will strengthen the linkages among identified partners by assigning someone capable to link potential partners as a source of goodwill. Internal partnership suggested that top management should initiate a step closer towards solving this problem so that normal education can still be attained despite the abnormality of the situation. Learning continuity initiatives suggest that since flexible learning is inevitable, educators should advocate learning methodology like creating a "talking module" so that the desired learning level expectancy is met in a way, the privilege provided by the government such as the free education can be compensated through a convincing result. Community engage learning to suggest that as a way of extending the provision of support through community-engaged efforts, the national government should appropriate and allocate additional funds to the local government units (LGU) which the later distributed to the community level as a way of supplementing the limited resources "the multimedia infrastructures" of the community. Restriction intensity suggests that meeting halfway could be a buyable and doable solution so that despite the spirit of this pandemic seeming normal as it seems, nothing could be considered as collateral damage and the learning linkages become stronger and realistic despite the test of time. Family-teacher support suggests that, for the initiative to remain effective and reflective, a review should be done so that the mechanisms, strategy, and tactical approach are well-defined which yields motivation and satisfaction spikes to the next level.

Keywords: Institutional linkage optimization: “an aide in combating educational challenges amidst the pandemic”

Introduction

As the world is being challenged by uncertainties of time and space, the academic institutions are mandated to find an initiative to create a dimension to explore beyond the traditional way in sustaining the dramatic change in educational setting wherein, by doing it alone seem impossible to cope due to the varying constraints. In meeting these challenges, every organization for survival needs collaborative support coming from different venues such as 1) industry counterparts, 2) internal partnerships, 3) learning continuity initiatives, 4) community-engaged learning, 5) restriction intensity, and 6) Family-teacher support. All these components seem beneficial to this endeavor. As the new normal dominates the educational platform, adherence to the adjustment is a must for all sectors in education which in turn, forces them to provide the requirements as mandated. Aside from strong support from the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), adaptive learning methods should be imposed to ensure the continuity of education and protection of learners from the effect of this pandemic due to COVID-19.

For more than a year now, the world shifted its focus in times where the pandemic strikes and disturbed the economic well-being not only in the Philippines but to the whole

world as well. The continuing fight against this pandemic COVID-19 depleted the government's financial capacity and stability due to some social obligation that needs immediate action. The top priority of the government is to protect all citizens in the republic thereby the birth of "BAYANIHAN TO HEAL AS ONE ACT" was created purposely to supplement the need of the people who are severely affected by the pandemic. The virus has no significant symptoms of leaving the environment hence, the continuing test of time is still evident and remains to be seen. Whatever the government does for the rest of its citizenry has limitations and it reduces the degree in terms of assistance provided as the pandemic prolonged. Hence the world nowadays is being challenged in many ways, people must be united with the government in finding a solution to the prevailing problem. Participation from different sectors in the environment is very essential to sustain the never-ending test of the global challenges. More so, that another critical variant is coming and affects an enormous number added on to current government burdens.

Methods

A qualitative research method was used in this study where the researcher design a self-made questionnaire in the form of an interview using the new normal survey platform such as Google met, Skype, Zoom for virtual interviews, call, text, and messenger were utilized to arrive the determined information. The 200 respondents of the study comprise three different groups: the randomly selected industries, department heads, and students. Responses are carefully recorded and tabulated for their accuracy. The basis of the observation covers 12 months from August 2020 to July 2021. A limited number of respondents was done on the face-to-face interview following the strong mandate from the Inter-Agency Task Force protocols. The gathered reports were descriptively triangulated to the ethnographic notes of the field of research on the specific period specified. Since the study deals with the institutional linkage optimization: "an aide in combating educational challenges amidst the pandemic in the Island of Mindanao, Philippines, the element of "truth" on the qualitative data, exchange of ideas, and other methods of generating prepondering shreds of evidence were carefully recorded.

Findings and Discussions

The institutional linkage optimization: "an aide in combating educational challenges amidst the pandemic in the Island of Mindanao, Philippines considers among others the 1) industry counterparts, 2) internal partnership, 3) learning continuity initiatives 4) community engage learning, 5) restriction intensity and 6) family-teacher support believe to be factors among others that affect the desired administrative trust in achieving quality learning amidst uncertainty. Thus, the findings below are:

Industry counterparts

Are businesses visibly found around the vicinity of any localities whose social responsibility is deemed necessary to help constituents as a way of reciprocating them for their consumer's loyalty. They grew their business with the help of the consuming public as their market. When consumers are affected, there is a so-called counter effect to them as well. However, they are not exempted to experience the same challenges brought about by this unstable environment. As the pandemic strikes, industry initiatives are concentrated much on how to sustain its operation considering that many impacts attributed by this pandemic will affect their moral obligation to the company. Diversion, stratification, and even modification are amongst the many things in the mind of the company just to survive. The pandemic per se, and for the majority brings a tremendous negative effect since it restrains the movement of people, and adjusting to it seems difficult for many. However, on the other side of the coin, it is an eye-opener to everyone whose mindset is exploring

new trends and avoidance of being stagnant. In these challenging times, one major avenue to surpass the test of this difficulty faced by everyone in different life standing is the so-called "BAYANIHAN" a government initiative in extending support to the needy and encourages partnership with those who have surplus at hand. As the saying goes..."no man is an island" or we need other lives for one to survive. Even if there are astonishing occurrence of unfavorable events, moving forward hand in hand can be a strong remedial action leading towards everyone's in achieving predetermined goals.

In an interview conducted between industry counterparts during this study, they expresses their intent to extend help especially so, that academic institution needs to be strengthened for they are the source of manpower needed for future explorations and besides, providing support is part of their social responsibility. Another partner interviewed was the group of "ALUMNI" who are now experiencing good life despite the pandemic manifest a positive views on the initiative of extending support to the institution in their quest of realizing their stated goals. On the other hand, group of respondents represented by the department heads when interviewed reveals also the same sentiments and believe that when all these identified partners unify for a common goal contribute a lot in strengthening academic operations even if we are facing uncertainties. The summative views of responses has given more weight when the students were interviewed as they both inclined to agree on the initiative expressed by those potential partners that they can make things possible in sustaining academic requirements. Since the opinion between different sets of partners is at "par" with each other, it is safe to suggest that strengthening linkages can be possible if the one assigned has the potential skill that can link partners in the form of goodwill. It cannot be denied that all of us experience a common predicament brought by this pandemic, touching others, working hand in hand is the key to easing the burden faced by everyone in this very challenging world.

Internal partnership

These are the academic arms instrumental in achieving the long-term academic goals of the institution. They should immerse themselves and adjust to the new norms of the academic approach by applying collaborative efforts. The Commission on Higher Education (CHED) brought together internal partners to promote academic linkages and even multisectoral partnership building. To maximize potentials during this pandemic, internal partnerships, interaction and experience sharing are amongst the best practices to undertake. This partnership "Internal" will enable the institution's educational setup to be updated with the latest trend. Faculty should keep abreast of the latest teaching mechanisms applied such as the use of multimedia resources effectively. They are the arm that can extend beyond education possibilities amidst the tremendous test of time. To remain effective in the field, the institution should continue to address the prevalence of matching between technical know-how and enhance some shortfall of the requirements.

Designing effective learning tools that address the difficulties in teaching deliveries during these pandemic times. The learning design is somewhat sophisticated as compared to the traditional way since educators should match up to their standard to the recipient "the student" in terms of their capacity in handling some unfavorable constraints were both of them experienced. The internal partners "the teachers" are doing their best to deliver what the students needed, however, matching the skills between teacher and student remains a challenge. As the academic activities continue, designing and re-designing task adheres in finding ways to make the standard upheld since education need not be compromised in whatever stake. Hence, achieving the desired quality output amidst this trying time is always a challenge to every internal partner "the teacher", meeting halfway between learners' needs and the teacher's method should be in place.

When an interview was conducted about how these internal partners "the teachers" initiate in delivering the needed education in a modern paradigm, they responded that there are efforts in providing all the necessary learning materials that will supplement the absence of the face-to-face educational platform. They further elaborate that they are using the most

effective and practical approach in their learning delivery. The end-users "the student" are not in agreement with the opinion of the teacher since they find it difficult to comprehend the design learning materials. When these groups were interviewed, common predicaments were drawn between the teachers by the students. These conflicting views suggest that teachers will design "talking" modules as learning materials for easy understanding of the students. Teachers also suggest that for easy learning, there should be a discussion via zoom in such a way that despite the absence of classroom activity, the delivery is more understandable than giving them the reading materials. While the interview was done, some shortcomings comes along the way wherein, although the teacher proposal is quite good, however, for the student became a problem due to the connectivity requirements. These predicaments are universally common therefore it is suggested that simplified learning modules should be designed and linkage between industry partners in every student location should be strengthened in a way, extending support such as connectivity can be provided as part of their social responsibility. It is further suggested that top management should take a step towards solving this problem so that education can still be normal despite the abnormality of the situation.

Learning continuity initiatives

Despite the prolonged difficulty that challenges especially in the aspect of education, schools in particular strongly continue in providing holistic education and enrich learners as stakeholders, part of their task in providing quality education. The government efforts which is initiated by the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) are supplementing the "gap" by utilizing the "Broadcast" education. This move widens up the learning initiatives amidst the pandemic which can be considered as a noble act the government does just to increase the value of education. Added into it is the facilitation of "lifelong learning" which encourages and motivates those students who are far away for quite so long in the umbrella of education. The provision of free education programs like the one through the UniFAST that invites more students to go back to school handy for them because they no longer have any burden paying matriculation and other fees. This innovation initiated by higher education institutions (HEIs) during challenging times is considered a remarkable step in combating the pandemic. The initiative yielded an applauding "Gawad Edukasyon Award" with the efforts in the most challenging times by bringing together educators and institutions to create, refine, and implement well-designed programs suited to the new normal education. This learning continuity trust initiative of the commission is made possible with the help of the United Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Act or UniFAST also known as Republic Act No. 10687 which was signed into law.

On the other hand, different groups of randomly selected respondents were asked terms how this initiative helps them, the group respondents represented by the students viewed it as very helpful to them, which means that whatever is their classification on economic standing in life, they appreciated this government initiative. There are conflicting findings revealed when an interview was done on the groups of teachers and department heads. Some unfavorable outcomes specifically on the aspect of student output. They noticed that some students' performance is unfavorable, which is supposed to be beyond the teacher's expectation as a result of being free from stress in financial obligations. However, students' opinions when interviewed reveal a unified predicament that all comes out due to the sudden change in educational platforms where the majority of them (the students) are not ready to adopt the change brought by the pandemic. This problem is common in different schools where most department heads agree with the student's sentiments. These findings are somewhat common to many educational institutions, and hence, it is suggested that all academic arms like teachers and department heads should convene and design a friendly learning mechanism especially since the long been awaited face-to-face classroom activity is somewhat impossible. The flexible learning is inevitable

that requires educators to advocate a learning methodology like creating a "talking module" so that the desired learning level expectancy is met in a way, the privilege provided by the government such as the free education can be compensated through a good result.

Community engage learning

Amidst the uncertainty of time and imposition of different levels of community quarantine classification which ban or even limits peoples movement, establishing community-engaged learning is essential to people as a way of reducing stress to live. The people's initiatives in the community engage learning from the Non-government organization (NGO) was established to supplement the local literacy helping the learners during the pandemic times. Before the pandemic, community-based learning was already established purposely to aid the grassroots levels and to enhance the capacity of the local community to answer and respond proactively to the social, political, and economic challenges and uplift their standard of living. It is just but timely that the academic landscape is challenged by the test of time, the community engages learning help a lot to learners especially those who are located in the far-flung areas where connectivity is a problem. Community as a partner for development considers the local government units in extending its social support to the less privileged but deserving populace for them to enjoy the learning modifications in the new normal. It is an intentional pedagogical strategy to integrate students learning into academic endeavors. This community engagement learning is beneficial to learners and teachers as they supplement and closes the gap of the student's needs by providing access to education.

The respondents, when interviewed regarding the local government initiative related to community engage learning applauded this initiative since this helps them a lot in terms of coping with the educational need through the provision of connectivity especially in these trying times. Learners find it very comfortable since the problem that affects them in their day-to-day lives is now becoming easier through the extension of the local government academic support. Another group of respondents was interviewed comprising the teachers found to have a positive response since the efforts extended by the local government units (LGU) make the students or the learners comply with the requirements on time. However, it was noted during the interview by the group of student's shows that not all local government units adopt the same as practiced by others, hence, it is suggested that all government units (LGU) as much as possible apply the common practice to aid the learners as part of their social responsibility to participate the majority in helping the learner during the pandemic times. Working hand in hand with the community could bring harmony towards the combat on the test of time and it could manifest that government services were brought closer to stakeholders. Moreover, as a way of extending the provision of support through community-engaged learning, the national government should appropriate allocate additional funds to the local government units (LGU) which the later distributed to the community level as a way of supplementing the limited resources of the community.

Restriction intensity

These are the control measures imposed by the government with the hope to flatten the curve that comes out very difficult for the local authorized agencies tasked to face this challenge. It has been a public knowledge that despite the unconditional efforts poured by the government, its spread (CORONA VIRUS) is evident and in fact, becoming more and more severe. The known coronavirus has not yet been solved even if more and more people are getting vaccinated since another unwelcomed variant (DELTA) comes in adding more headaches to government and businesses alike. Due to these restrictions, the economic aspects which play a major role in society are hampered up to the point where there are no clear directions on what comes next. The normal cycle is no longer observed since there is a so-called disagreement between the interest of the government and the business sectors.

Even if the government looks into the consequences to occur on both sides of the coin, still considers "health" as the primordial concern. This restriction forces business closures since they are only allowed to operate at a very short time with limited capacity: more so, those considered as non-essential carrying business outlets are bound to close with no definite time allowed to reopen. The prolonged government mandate on different restriction classifications severely affects the economy in general. The majority of the populace in today's unexpected changes in the environment, lose their directions and are full of questions not answerable by anyone since no one knows what comes next. Day by day, different control orders are released by the government where businesses are in a dilemma and face the danger of uncertainties behind. The government desires to put things in order and balance the situation (Health and Economy), the impossibilities ruled due to the fears and worry that the majority suffer caused by government negligence. All restrictions nowadays are foreseen to be ineffective since, even how the government imposes those control measures, people don't dare the adherence of following due to the unfathomed needs which result to violate the government mandate. Even if the government releases an amount used as aid (AYUDA) from the special amelioration funds (SAF), it is not even enough for a family to sustain their daily needs.

The whole country is into a health crisis wherein different quarantine classifications are implemented depending on the area's status. A test was made by controlling people's movement for they strongly believe that influx of people caused the virus to spread. Different classification imposed and was then observed to check its effectiveness but unluckily, the spread spikes up to the point beyond expectations. It has come to the level where the government opt to lift the restrictions due to its desire to generate rapid progress however, they are in doubt that the end may not satisfy the means. At this time, there is no indication of the change in their status that shows any favorable figure that will somehow stabilize the feelings of the majority of the residents. A daily report from different sources is in agreement that the spread and the number of people infected continuously increases which cripples down the economy and destabilizes their living due to the loss of jobs brought about by business closures. As this pandemic lauded the environment, all types of emotional classifications are present to human beings resulting in stress that excuses no one. An interview was conducted to some business sectors alike, comes out that they have the same predicaments, much as they wish to normally go into business but because of the limitation and restrictions affect their forecast in achieving their set goals. Beneficiaries also interviewed using the same questions find themselves at a disadvantage since the intent to extend support is curtailed temporarily and uncertain as to when the economy becomes stable and restrictions are lifted thereby giving them all the privileges to explore. With this, and since the restrictions intensity despite government believed to be the solution to the spread of the virus, it is suggested however that a review should be conducted to ensure its effectiveness using the cost and benefit analysis. Meeting halfway could be a buyable solution so that despite the spirit of this pandemic seeming normal as it seems, nothing could be considered as collateral damage and the linkages become stronger despite the test of time.

Family-teacher support

To stay stable and become normal despite the abnormality of time, helping one another is the only key where gone are the days traditional approach in learning has been long enjoyed is far beyond imagination. The occurrence of this pandemic the COVID-19 brings some unsolicited relationship build up between parents and students. As a way of helping the learners, parents nowadays seem very active and extend beyond limits in terms of support for their children. The module distribution comes to a habit for the parents and looks forward to another exciting thing to happen. It builds up a strong tie among parents and their students since classes are widely done on a modular learning base. A recent report by "Herrold and O'Donnell" (2008) from the National Center for Education Statistics found

that over 90% of parents of elementary school children reported attending general school meetings. This manifest that despite the tremendous test of time, parents are becoming more responsive to the need of their children. In the old and traditional way of learning, only teacher and student's play the role of education. Parents are more likely to make follow and updates on the learner's progress now and then. Surprisingly, as the changing time appears brought about by the pandemic, drastic change happens not only in the environment but utmost on the day-to-day life of the individual in the surroundings. An initiative from the higher authorities issues a mandate to further strengthen the role of parents as education frontline amid COVID -19 pandemic conducted a series of psychosocial support and training for parents, teachers, and school heads purposely to lead them on the appropriateness of the implementation of this mandate.

Meanwhile, the devastating impact of this pandemic and is now becoming a crisis in the global arena, the mode of learning has not changed. Many learners dream and hope of coming back to their normal educational venue but it seems no signs of realizing those long been awaited come back to classroom learning. The department of education (DepEd) had launched the "GABAY BAHAY", an online parenting series aimed at engaging parents and protecting the health and safety and well-being of their children. With the emergence of the pandemic, the responsibilities in educating students have become more challenging while schools are temporarily stopped and face some obstacles in fulfilling the continuity of learning. It is considered a blessing on the part of the school since the active parent's participation did not hamper the educational requirements of the students.

On the other hand, to assess the support extended by teachers to students and parents as well, a survey was conducted to see that the goal of sustaining the educational landscape will still be on the right track. Respondents were asked through the use of multimedia infrastructure reveal that the teacher and parents' supports are evident, some are not so convinced on the initiative extended by the school for different reasons. A group of respondents was asked to answer the same instrument containing the question on how satisfied they are with the parents and teacher supports, negatively responded that when it comes to satisfaction level, they are not that satisfied. The conflicting views of the respondents surveyed and interviewed come in a different version. Some groups of respondents positively answered that they are satisfied with the effort made by teachers and parent supports. The responses seem subjective; which means that there is a disagreement between groups of respondents. This implies that not all appreciated those efforts made by them which suggest that for the initiative to remain effective, a review should be conducted in a way, the provision of services and satisfaction level increases.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Institutional linkage optimization an aide in combating educational challenges amidst the pandemic consider some elements useful in sustaining academic goals such as 1) **Industry counterparts** reveal that different sets of partners are at "par" with each other, hence, it is suggested that the institution will strengthen the linkages among identified partners by assigning someone capable to link potential partners as a source of goodwill. 2) **Internal partnership** suggested that top management should initiate a step closer towards solving this problem so that normal education can still be attained despite the abnormality of the situation. 3) **Learning continuity initiatives** suggest that since flexible learning is inevitable, educators should advocate learning methodology like creating a "talking module" so that the desired learning level expectancy is met in a way, the privilege provided by the government such as the free education can be compensated through a convincing result. 4) **Community engage learning to** suggest that as a way of extending the provision of support through community-engaged learning, the national government should appropriate and allocate additional funds to the local government units (LGU) which the later distributed to the community level as a way of supplementing the limited resources "the multimedia infrastructures" of the community. 5) **Restriction intensity** suggests that meeting halfway could be a buyable and doable solution so that despite the spirit of this

pandemic seeming normal as it seems, nothing could be considered as collateral damage and the learning linkages become stronger and realistic despite the test of time. 6) **Family-teacher support** suggests that, for the initiative to remain effective and reflective, a review should be done so that the mechanisms, strategy, and tactical approach are well-defined which yields motivation and satisfaction spikes to the next level.

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