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SSAPI Panel at SKIMA 2023

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Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization experiences at South Asian HEIs

Book of abstracts

SSAPI, Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes, is a CBHE project co-funded by the European Union (ref no. 619438-EPP-1-2020-1-PK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP), composed by 11 Universities from 6 countries, that aims to create learning and practising opportunities for partner country HEIs staff including administrative staff, faculty, students and researchers. Training will focus on learning from EU partners, and developing procedures to modernize the education system. More information at <https://ssapi-project.net/>



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Panel session at SKIMA 2023

Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization experiences at South Asian HEIs

In an era marked by increasing globalization and the growing demand for high-quality education, South Asian HEIs are at the forefront of adapting to these evolving trends. International accreditation of academic programs and increasing the internationalization of higher education have become vital components in ensuring the competitiveness and relevance of institutions in this region. This panel brings together experts, educators, and thought leaders to explore the crucial role that accreditation plays in enhancing program quality and the various internationalization strategies employed by South Asian HEIs to foster global collaboration, diversity, and excellence.

The panel session, organized by the [SSAPI](#) consortium, is open to all the SKIMA community.

The program is composed of two events: a **keynote** and the **panel** itself. The panel will be composed, among others, of the SSAPI consortium universities representatives.

- Keynote (30 min): Cheki Dorji, Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan
- Panel (60 min):
 - Cheki Dorji, Royal University of Bhutan, Bhutan
 - Deepika Priyadarshani, SLTC, Sri Lanka
 - Dhammika Herath, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
 - Ingrid Rügge, University of Bremen, Germany (*moderator*)
 - Mohamed Adil and Fazeela Ibrahim, Villa College, Maldives
 - Rameshwar Rijal, Kathmandu Engineering College, Nepal (*special invitee*)
 - Shahuneeza Naseer, Maldives National University, Maldives
 - Teresa Gonçalves, University of Évora, Portugal (*moderator*)
 - Wangchuk, Khesar Gyalpo Medical University of Bhutan, Bhutan

[SSAPI](#), *Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes*, is a CBHE project co-funded by the European Union (ref no. 619438-EPP-1-2020-1-PK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP), composed by 11 Universities from 6 countries, that aims to create learning and practising opportunities for partner country HEIs staff including administrative staff, faculty, students and researchers. Training will focus on learning from EU partners, and developing procedures to modernize the education system. More information at <https://ssapi-project.net/>



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The Erasmus+ SSAPI project

Erasmus+ SSAPI (Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes) is a joint project venture of 11 institutions in 6 partnering countries aiming toward capacity building in the field of higher education. The project partnership consists of 9 South Asian Universities (from Bhutan, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) and 2 renowned European Universities (from Germany and Portugal) to guide the South Asian partners.

This project aims to create learning and practising opportunities for partner country HEIs staff including administrative staff, faculty, students, and researchers. Training of faculty and staff will help to learn how to improve the quality of education at partner countries' HEIs.

This project will contribute effectively in creating reforms in the overall higher education system of the partner HEIs. Overall, the project aims to develop a comprehensive framework for the standardization of Higher Education systems, policies, and procedures, working together toward a knowledge-driven and intensive economy with a special focus on the quality and improvement of intellectual assets of the partner country HEIs.

An important part of the project is dissemination and publicity. A Dissemination and Publicity Committee (DPC) consisting of members from all partner countries looks after dissemination activities. Following is a brief of dissemination work done:

- the project website (<https://ssapi-project.net/>) provides information on the project and activities to relevant stakeholders and the general public. It shows an overview of the project along with links to some key documents. It also provides information about the objectives, goals, phases and work packages of the project, as well as details on trainings, meetings, workshops and conferences;
- in addition to the website, other dissemination activities include publication of a brochure and newsletter, a Facebook page and a LinkedIn page.

The SKIMA conference provides an excellent opportunity for the project to disseminate and publicize its activities. A panel was set up where most Asian partners present their contribution and what they have achieved so far under the SSAPI project; the European partners moderate the session.

Dr. Amir Qayyum, Project coordinator

Keynote

Internationalization of Programmes of Royal University of Bhutan through Erasmus+ SSAPI Project



Dr. Cheki Dorji is currently the President of College of Science and Technology, Royal University of Bhutan. Obtained his bachelor in Civil Engineering from Regional Engineering College Warangal, India and his Master in Infrastructure Planning and Management and Doctoral Degree in Civil Engineering from Yokohama National University, Japan. He has 30 years of teaching experience in Civil Engineering. He has authored/co-authored more than 25 peer-reviewed scientific papers. He was awarded the National Order of Merit (Gold) by His Majesty the King of Bhutan in December 2012 for his exemplary service to the Nation Building in the field of Education. He received the Best Presenter's Award from Japan Society of Civil Engineers in 2008. Prior to the current post he served as the Director of the College of Science and Technology. He is currently the member of Royal University Council, member of Academic Board of Royal University of Bhutan, Board Director of State Trading Corporation of Bhutan, Served as Editor of Bhutan Journal of Research and Development, Head of Civil Engineering Department, Controller of Examination and has led development of Civil Engineering and Architecture Programme at CST. He has led the development of two and half years Diploma and now two years Civil Engineering Diploma Programme at Jigme Namgyel Engineering College. He has served as a focal person for EU Erasmus Mundus Projects since 2006 and executed more than 20+ EU funded projects and still executes 2 EU funded Erasmus + Projects.

Capacity Building for Internationalization of Programs at CUST under SSAPI Project

Introduction

Capital University of Science and Technology (CUST) is a leading private sector university in Pakistan that offers a variety of degree programs at all levels from BS to PhD. CUST is the main coordinator of the Erasmus+ SSAPI (Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes) project aimed at capacity building for internationalization and accreditation of programs at Asian higher education institutes. This report describes the progress that has been made so far at CUST under the SSAPI project. The report is organized according to work packages, and under each work package the progress made by CUST is discussed.

Preparation Phase

In the preparation phase, all partner HEIs were required to select their degree programs to be considered for international accreditation. CUST offers a number of diverse programs from engineering to health sciences. However, the most prominent programs in terms of the number of students and faculty at CUST are computer science and business administration programs, therefore CUST selected these two programs: BS (computer science) and BBA (bachelors of business administration). In Pakistan, accreditation agencies of various programs are moving towards OBE (outcome-based education) system. All engineering programs of CUST have already implemented OBE system as a requirement of Pakistan's accreditation agency for engineering programs, i.e., Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) which is also a signatory of the Washington Accord. BS (computer science) and BBA programs at CUST started implementation of OBE system in 2021 as their relevant accreditation agencies in Pakistan, i.e., National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC) and National Business Education Accreditation Agency (NBEAC), have required OBE implementation. CUST believes that the selected programs, BS (computer science) and BBA, will benefit most from internationalization and international accreditation under the SSAPI project. Both selected degree programs are the oldest programs at CUST and have a very good reputation in the country.

After selection of the programs, an accreditation preparedness assessment questionnaire was designed by the European partners and all Asian partners were required to provide the detailed information of the selected programs. CUST project team provided the required data to European partners by filling in the questionnaire for both programs. European partners evaluated the data and provided useful feedback in the online meetings during the first year, and in July 2022, during the visit of CUST team to the University of Bremen, detailed discussion was held and feedback was given by the European partners.

For international accreditation of its selected programs, CUST project team considered various European accreditation agencies, their scope, accreditation process and criteria. CUST team also discussed with the other project partners in Pakistan, and provisional shortlisted ASIIN for accreditation of its programs.

Development Phase

In the development phase, a number of trainings were held. Initially, due to Covid restrictions, trainings were held in online mode. These trainings were delivered by experts from European partner universities, i.e., University of Bremen, Germany, and University of Evora, Portugal. Later on, when Covid restrictions were relaxed, a team of faculty members from the selected programs of CUST visited University of Bremen for a 2-week training in July 2022, and later in July 2023, another 2-week training was held. CUST fully participated in all trainings. In September 2023, Professor Tobias from University of Bremen visited Pakistan for on-site trainings. During his visit, he spent 4 days at CUST and conducted various training sessions including interaction with faculty, students and research groups. CUST has started implementation of outcome based education (OBE) system in both selected programs. Course level and program level objectives have been defined and approved by relevant bodies. Faculty development workshops have been held on the OBE system and its implementation.

Conclusion

The Erasmus+ SSAPI project has helped CUST in its capacity building and in improving its systems. The main objective of the project is to prepare CUST for international accreditation. With the administrative support from the university management, CUST intends to achieve this objective.

National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences

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Advancing Academic Excellence: NUCES's Journey towards International Accreditation and Global Recognition

Introduction

The National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences (NUCES), Islamabad, Pakistan, is dedicated to advancing its academic programs, particularly in the domains of Computer Science and Business Administration. Founded as a Federally Chartered University in July 2000, the National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences is a premiere University of Pakistan, renowned for quality and impact of its students in the development of software and business industries. The university has five modern campuses at Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Peshawar and Chiniot-Faisalabad. These campuses provide world class educational environment and recreational facilities to about over 16,000 students, around one quarter are female and over 700 skilled faculty members.

This abstract presents an overview of NUCES's involvement in the ERASMUS sponsored project, "Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes (SSAPI)." NUCES's aims to exploit SSAPI platform to meet the European accreditation standards for BS Computer Science and BBA program. NUCES participated actively in SSAPI activities by providing the necessary information related to current academic procedures with the European partners. Based on the feedback received from the relevant experts, a comprehensive strategy has been developed to incorporate the corrective actions to reduce the identified gaps to meet the requirements of European accreditation.

SSAPI Activities

To align with international standards, NUCES has targeted EUR-INF accreditation for its BS Computer Science program and FIBAA accreditation for the BBA program. EUR-INF accreditation ensures that the curriculum meets specified criteria for content, depth, and breadth, ensuring graduates possess essential knowledge and skills. FIBAA accreditation for the BBA program emphasizes the development of competencies in business administration, fostering a comprehensive understanding of contemporary business challenges.

NUCES has made significant strides in meeting accreditation requirements. Several training sessions were organized for administrative staff, faculty, and students, with a focus on incorporating the best international practices and adhering to guidelines from the SSAPI Project European partners. The primary objective was to ease and enhance the implementation of changes necessary for international accreditation and overall improvement in teaching and learning. In addition to formalizing the traditional pedagogical training, the institution has conducted specialized training sessions facilitated by subject experts, focusing on problem-solving and decision-making systems. Also, initiatives have been implemented to enhance

awareness of intellectual property rights for a developing country, a critical component in the modern technological landscape with cooperation of the SSAPI partners.

The training programs were meticulously planned, featuring experts in their respective fields as resource persons for specific sessions that were formulated in light of the corrective actions. European trainers have been invited to visit the campus and provide training under the SSAPI umbrella. The trainers have the expertise in multiple related disciplines facilitating not only the academic aspects as well as industrial deployment of the involved technologies. These training initiatives have demonstrated their effectiveness in enhancing the university's overall system. The table below illustrates participants' responses to select training sessions.

No	Training Title	No Participants	Pre-training level of competencies	Post-training level of competencies
1	Project/Production Planning and Control (PPC)	25	55%	80%
2	Teaching Practical Problem Solving (PPS) in practice" & Tutorial Class	38	59%	84%
3	Interdisciplinary Insights: Fostering Collaborative Learning Between Computer Science and General Education Instructors for BS CS Students	35	56%	82%
4	Distributed Model Predictive Control	22	80%	90%

To support internationalization efforts, NUCES has restructured its administrative processes. The establishment of an International Office serves as a pivotal step to streamline student exchange programs and facilitate teacher exchange with foreign universities. This facilitates the cross-cultural exchange of knowledge and expertise, contributing to a richer academic experience.

The ongoing efforts to meet accreditation requirements and foster internationalization offer numerous benefits to NUCES. Accreditation ensures that the university's programs adhere to globally recognized standards, enhancing the credibility and value of NUCES degrees. International collaborations contribute to a diverse learning environment, preparing students for global challenges. The establishment of formalized processes and training programs enhances the overall academic ecosystem, positioning NUCES as a leader in higher education.

Conclusion and Future Activities

NUCES is committed to the principles of continuous improvement, internationalization, and meeting the stringent standards set by accreditation bodies. The ERASMUS-sponsored project, SSAPI, stands as a testament to the institution's dedication to excellence. Through strategic initiatives, NUCES is poised to not only meet accreditation requirements but also to provide a world-class educational experience to its students. NUCES aims to further strengthen the internationalization aspect by engaging with SSAPI partners as well as reputable HEIs having strong informatics and business departments. The scope of engagement will include both student and staff exchange for research as well as pedagogical experience exchange.

The Impact of Erasmus SSAPI Capacity Building Project on Higher Education at Riphah International University

Introduction

Riphah International University is one of the Asian partners in the Erasmus SSAPI+ project. The program selected for capacity building in this project is BS Computer Science. It is important to mention that the program has been accredited by the local accreditation agency known as National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC) which is authorized by the Higher Education Commission to accredit the computing programs. The NCEAC is also responsible for providing the curriculum for computing programs to all the public and private sector universities of Pakistan.

Trainings

Since the beginning of the project in 2021, Riphah University has actively participated in all the trainings. Owing to COVID restrictions, the first training was conducted in online mode, in May 2022 by the University of Portugal. The team from Riphah International University attended the second training at the University of Bremen, Germany in July 2022 which was face-to-face training. The team attended the third training at the University of Evora, Portugal in July 2023. The fourth training was conducted by the trainer from the University of Bremen in Pakistan in September 2023. All of these trainings provided opportunity for the Riphah team to interact with the experts and identify the potential areas of improvement at both the strategic and operational level. One more on-site training has been planned in February 2024 which will be conducted by the representative from the University of Evora, Portugal.

Improvements

The first improvement was the establishment of industrial advisory board which had representatives from the IT/Software companies and official industrial forums. Later on, to make it more effective, an international member was also added to the board. The immediate outcome of this intervention was the interaction of faculty with industry and interaction of industry with students. The second outcome was the important changes in the courses which could align the students with industry.

The second outcome was the internship opportunities for the students. A complete policy for internship was formulated and approved by the Academic Council. As an outcome, the students joined the summer internships in 2023.

The third improvement was to initiate the outcome-based education (OBE). The faculty members were given trainings on OBE and the process of conversion to OBE was started in a gradual manner and it is expected to complete it in the next two years.

The fourth improvement was to involve students in decision making at official forums. Thus, for the departmental board of studies, now, two students are appointed as members who attend the meeting and see and learn how the academic decisions are made and the student members are encouraged to give their opinions.

The fifth improvement was alumni engagement. Previously, a limited record of alumni was available at the department but now, it has been decided to expand, improve and implement it at the university level. This will help to further improve the academic ranking of the university.

Conclusion

The measures taken so far have a number of potential offshoots which will be operationalized with the passage of time. The first one is the duplication of the lessons learnt to other programs in the faculty and other faculties of the university. Yet another one is the pathway for international collaborations. The Riphah team is now motivated to submit proposals for other funding opportunities for mutual benefits of national and regional universities. The project has brought partner universities closer for research collaborations as well.

Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization: Lessons Learnt from German and Portuguese Partners

Introduction

The vital role of international accreditation and internationalization has emerged as an important dimension in many higher education institutes (HEIs) in Sri Lanka, attributable to the influence of diverse capacity-building initiatives undertaken in the recent past. Internationalization promotes collaboration and synchronization through collaborative projects and research endeavors between international partners. It underscores academic mobility, contributes to the improvement of quality, and facilitates the internationalization of curricula, incorporating elements such as the integration of digital learning (European Commission, 2007, 2013). The ERASMUS+ program plays a significant role in shaping internationalization policies within higher education on national, European, and global scales. This paper discusses the impact of project “Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)/(SSAPI), funded by EACEA under the Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) program” at SLT Campus (SLTC), Sri Lanka.

SLT Campus

Surrounded by lush greenery in a sprawling state; at the iconic satellite station of the Sri Lanka Telecom at Padukka, Sri Lanka, the SLTC founded in 2015 as the country’s first non-state higher education institute that awards local engineering degrees. The institute’s iconic main residential campus offers its residents the ideal university experience, and the TRACE Campus in Colombo presents its residents with the ultimate urban university atmosphere with all its opportunities. The university’s vision is to be a center of excellence in higher education and research that creates knowledge and human resource capabilities necessary to devise and drive innovations for the purpose of effecting positive economic and societal changes. Therefore SLTC culture is centered on promoting research and innovation and is the prime focus of its academic operations. SLTC currently has 07 faculties that award more than 25 undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in diverse disciplines. The accreditation and internationalization emerges as a critical parameter for SLTC in realizing its visionary objectives. Hence, as one of 11 partners of SSAPI consortium, experiences gained through SSAPI project posters are paramount in promoting accreditation and internationalization at SLTC.

Participants

Six members representing different units, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty Business Management, Faculty of IT and Computing, Quality Assurance Unit, Examination Unit and International Office have participated two training programmes spanning for two weeks at University of Bremen, Germany and University of Evora,

Portugal in July 2022 and July 2023 respectively. Members explored two very closely related issues, the integration of the quality dimension in internationalization policies in higher education and the adaptation of European quality assurance policies and good practices to local context.

Lesson Learnt: Internationalization

The internationalization in higher education mainly occurred through student and staff mobilities. Asian Partners staff training is one of the key activities of the SSAPI project provides as it aims at providing strategic support by transferring knowhow and creating competencies within Asian partners to proceed towards quality assurance, accreditation and internationalization in the field of higher education. SLTC uses this experience to synthesize best practices with the aim to move forward to seek international accreditation in the field of engineering, management and IT.

The University of Bremen (Universitat Bremen) has defined thematic and regional priorities and promotes the continuous strategic development of global cooperation. Through the mutual relationship SLTC was able to develop over the period of the SSAPI project, a strategic partnership for staff and research mobility was agreed. Academic and non-academic staff mobility is a fundamental enabler in the University of Évora's internationalization process. The opportunity is granted through training for professional development. The best practices learnt from Evora expertise on digitalization in higher education will contribute effectively in creating reforms in the current system of SLTC towards digitalization of education processes.

Lesson Learnt: Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Accreditation is the process by which a (non-)governmental or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or of a specific educational programme in order to formally recognize it as having met certain pre-determined minimal criteria or standards. (Vlasceanu, Grunberg and Parlea, 2007). University of Bremen has been granted system accreditation which assures high quality of teaching and research whereas University of Evora's Internal Quality Assurance System was certified by A3ES, Portugal guiding its action by promoting assessment, quality and continuous improvement in all aspects of its intervention: teaching, research, innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration with the community.

The faculties of Engineering, IT and Computing, and Business Management received strategic support through peer evaluation of their self-evaluation reports. This assistance, provided by both Bremen and Evora partners, played a crucial role in the institutionalization of a systematic and effective approach to Institutional Reviews (IR) and the compilation of Program Review processes (consisting of IR and Self-Evaluation Reports).

Conclusion

This paper presents the experiences and insights gained from the SSAPI project undertaken by SLT Campus in Sri Lanka. Within the framework of the Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) program under the European Agency for Culture and Education (EACEA), the SSAPI project plays as a crucial initiative providing essential support to Asian partners. It plays a vital role in facilitating the institutionalization of best European practices, contributing significantly to the pursuit of international accreditation for programs and fostering internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes, including SLT Campus in Sri Lanka.

Acknowledgment

The support extended by the European Commission within the framework of the Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) program is sincerely acknowledged. SLT Campus expresses deep gratitude for the invaluable guidance and strategic assistance received in the areas of quality assurance, accreditation, and internationalization from both EU partners, the University of Bremen in Germany, and the University of Evora in Portugal.

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Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programmes and Internationalization at the University of Peradeniya

Introduction

A conglomeration of Asian Universities including the University of Peradeniya was chosen for funding by the European Union Erasmus + CBHE Programme. The new project entitled 'Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programmes and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes. The University of Peradeniya has strived to achieve the following as the major objectives of this project.

1. Support the Faculties to institutionalize a systematic and effective Intuitional Reviews (IR) and Programme Review processes (compilation of IR and Self Evaluation Reports).
2. Support the University of Peradeniya through strategic support to Faculties to improve international rankings of the University
3. To support internationalization of selected degree programmes at the level of Faculties
4. Develop a system and a process for obtaining local and international accreditation for selected degree programmes

Academics and officials from three programmes were provided with capacity building training via onsite as well as online training with the support of European partners. The training resulted in improving the quality assurance process, internationalization and significant changes in the quality of the selected programmes. While this quality improvement is an ongoing process, the programmes are expected to apply for international accreditation towards the end of the project. We at the University of Peradeniya find that the training experience in accreditation has lead to wide range of impacts. It has built the social networks of the participating academics and the programmes they represent. It has encouraged the programmes to re-examine the curriculum and motivated them to revise the curriculum to meet current local and international requirements. It is expected that accreditation at recognized bodies will enable the relevant programmes to attract more foreign students. International students and scholars contribute to improve the academic environment, sharing of knowledge and most importantly to higher international ranking of the respective programmes and the universities.

Conclusion

The accreditation and internationalization training has brought together 11 partner universities, and it has encouraged them to work together in areas outside of the scope of the project through signing MOUs etc. The effort made to obtaining accreditation lead through a rigorous path and it fosters a significant change in

the quality of the study programmes and set in motion a process which brings study programmes of Asian universities on par with recognized study programmes in Europe. It brings a minor but acceptable homogenization aspect too. It is expected that the knowledge acquired, and the capacity built through the project will gradually be transferred to programmes which were not part of the training and thus the project will have wider impact across the University of Peradeniya.

Royal University of Bhutan

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Learning Experiences and Preparedness of Royal University of Bhutan towards its Programme Accreditation and Internationalization through Erasmus+ Capacity Project

Introduction

This paper presents the learning experiences gained by College of Science and Technology (CST), Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) through the project titled “Strategic Support for Programme Accreditation and Internationalization in South Asian Higher Education institutes (SSAPI) project” funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building Higher Education Programme of the European Union (EU). RUB is one of the partners among 11 other universities. The main aim of the project is to prepare the programmes at Asian Partner Universities for accreditation and internationalization through the training of relevant staff from Asian Partners by two EU Partner Universities and also sharing of best practices with the Partners. The project was awarded in 2020 with a duration of 3 years from 14th January 2021 to 14th January 2024.

The College of Science & Technology (CST) under Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) is the premier college providing higher education in Engineering in Bhutan. Currently the College is being accredited by Bhutan National Accreditation Agency but has not been able to accredit any of its engineering programmes by an international accreditation agency. As a result, internationalizing the institute and its programmes has become a challenge for the College and University as whole. Therefore, there is a need to develop the capacity of the College on programme accreditation and internationalization, and the project was proposed to address the needs.

Method

Under this project, the College was able to understand the current status of the Bachelor of Electrical Engineering programme and Bachelor of Engineering in Information Technology programme for accreditation and internationalization. The College trained 8 staff training on various areas focusing on European accreditation & Quality Assurance System and internationalization strategies at Bremen University of Germany and University of Evora, Portugal. Further more than 200 students and 50 staff had participated in the similar trainings conducted via virtual mode and on-site at the CST Campus.

Result

The project has facilitated the College to enhance the understanding of its key limitations and strengths of its programmes for accreditation and internationalization. We have learnt that all our Programmes have fair enough to meet most of quality monitoring indicator requirements of the international accreditation body

such as curriculum development, standard review process, credit system, quality assurance system, teaching learning methods, assessment & examination, faculty evaluation process, internship, academic-industry collaborations, stakeholders feedback system and rate of employment. However, we do not fulfil some requirements of accreditation mainly teaching staff profile and total research contributions.

It was determined all our programmes has less flexible curriculum structure to support flexible learning pathways and student mobility compared to flexible curriculum structure to support flexible student mobility across European Universities and credit transfer. It was observed that all our programmes have relatively high teaching hours with students and more micro assessment components in the unit of learning compared to the European system. All the limitations observed will be used during the development and review of the programmes to make a more student centric approach of learning and support flexible learning pathways and mobility programs for students.

The College is currently reviewing the teaching and learning of the Flipped Class that was introduced since 2022 to make teaching and learning student centric. It was also learnt that through discussion and training with experts from European Universities, it was observed that the current practice of introducing Flipped Class every week has not achieved the intended outcome. Both tutors and students also had similar feedback and currently the flipped class teaching method is under review.

It was learnt that national accreditation agencies in Europe follow the accreditation guidelines of the European Quality Agency. The European accreditation process of the new study programme is observed to be similar to the programme validation process of Royal University of Bhutan, while the assessment of the study programme in operations by the accreditation agency is that of the periodic programme review process currently practiced.

The knowledge and experiences gained from the collaboration is being used in the development of a national credit transfer framework for higher education in Bhutan in October 2023. From the College the two trained staff was also identified as the member of the national core working group for developing the framework based on Bhutan Qualification Framework by the Bhutan Qualification and Professional Certification Agency

Conclusion

The College through such collaboration was able to learn accreditation and internationalization practices of European Universities. The College managed to train 8 staff training on various areas focusing on European accreditation & Quality Assurance System and internationalization strategies in Universities in Europe and more than 200 students and 50 staff in the similar trainings online also on-site at the CST Campus. The College successfully drafted the accreditation document for Electrical Engineering and IT programme with experts and review support from two EU partners. The College is looking towards achieving its programme accreditation and internationalization.

Experiences and insights gained from the Erasmus+ SSAPI Project - Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan

Introduction

We present the experiences and insights gained from our maiden involvement as one of the partner of the project consortium for the ongoing project titled “Strategic Support for Programme Accreditation and Internationalization in South Asian Higher Education institutes (SSAPI) project” funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building Higher Education Programme of the European Union (EU).

KGUMSB was established in 2013 to administer and oversee the provision and training in the fields of medical and health sciences. There are 3 constituent faculties- Faculty of Nursing and Public Health(FNPH), Faculty of Post Graduate Medicine and Faculty of Traditional Medicine- and 3 affiliated private nursing colleges offering 34 different programmes in medicine, nursing, allied health and traditional medicine. FNPH offers 13 three-year diplomas and 4 four-year Bachelor's programmes in Nursing, Public Health and Allied Health Sciences. Since its establishment in 1974 as a health school, it has produced more than 3000 health professionals who serve in the hospitals and primary health centres across the country as the backbone of the health care delivery services, reaching out to 95% of the population.

The institute is accredited by the Bhutan national accreditation agency but it is not accredited to any international accreditation bodies due to resource constraints. As the only medical university in the country, it has become imperative to standardize the quality of the programs offered. However, despite the concept of quality assurance, accreditation and internationalization components captured in the university policy documents, there are gaps in terms of implementation.

Objectives

The main goals of the project is to build capacity of the staff and faculty, learn from the experiences of European and Asian partners on quality assurance, standardization, and international accreditation process geared towards preparing priority programs for accreditation and internationalization in future.

Capacity building and training

Through this project, KGUMSB has reviewed the Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Midwifery program, identified strengths and weaknesses and refined the document for accreditation and internationalization. Seven faculties were trained on European accreditation & Quality Assurance System and internationalization strategies at Bremen University, Germany and University of Evora, Portugal. This was followed by on-site trainings of 27 faculty, management and administrative staff by EU partners on quality assurance and accreditation process, and methods of evaluation of academic programs. In addition, critical

teaching learning equipment including smart boards, printers, projectors, photocopying machines and computers were purchased.

The review of the program documents by professors from Bremen identified strengths and gaps in the nursing program. Although basic requirements for the international accreditation standards including curriculum design and review process, teaching learning methods, assessment, evaluation process, admission, credit system, faculty qualifications, research standards are in place, there is a need to institute feedback system for stakeholders and beneficiaries and alumni tracer study is recommended to track graduate employability status. The Nursing and midwifery curriculum which is currently under the process needs to include flexible contents that is student centered. Similarly for teaching methodologies, a broad list of teaching methods are recommended.

Conclusion

Overall, the insights gained and the capacity built through the SSAPI project enhanced competencies of faculty and management staff that contributed significantly towards pursuing international accreditation for the nursing program and fostering internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes. In addition, it guided the quality assurance team in developing university quality management guideline and monitoring & evaluation framework in line with international best practices.

Villa College

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Striding Towards Accreditation of programs and Internationalization: Villa College's Progress Along with the SSAPI Project

Introduction

Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalisation at South Asian Higher Education Institutes (SSAPI), a project funded by Erasmus+, provided a much needed spring board for the Villa College, in the small island nation of the Maldives, to pursue accreditation of academic programs and to achieve international recognition.

This paper outlines four key takeaways from the implementation of the project from the perspective of a small higher education (HE) provider in an emerging small island nation.

Faculty focus beyond the EEZ

SSAPI project, from its start in 2021, helped the faculties build a vision beyond the borders of the chain islands. While the institute had strong ties with cross-border HE institutions, since its inception, these interactions had predominantly taken the form of franchise agreements placing Villa College in a receiving role. The international collaborations Villa College has engaged with well-established universities have played a critical role in enhancing the quality of internal operations and academic aspects. While these partnerships have traditionally focused on the offering of franchise programmes, the evolving landscape of transnational collaboration in recent decades have opened new opportunities beyond this scope. The realization of the broader scope of benefits from internationalisation and the wider role the institute can potentially play through initiatives such as joint academic programs, collaborative research and mobility of both staff and students, have yielded positive effects on the organizational vision with more focused alignment with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Numerous new initiatives have been launched, with a noteworthy example being Villa College's pursuit of global recognition through QS rating. In August of 2023, Villa College achieved a significant milestone by becoming the first higher education institute in the Maldives to receive a QS Stars Rating, with an Overall QS Rating of 4 Stars. This is no small feat for the very young HE community in the Maldives. While internationalisation remains the most challenging aspect to score, the progress is reassuring.

New matrices

The institution's new found desire to be recognized internationally has been immediately followed by the realization that the global recognition demands new matrices. Metrics such as the international faculty and student ratio, number of nationalities in its student body composition, number of joint programs, number of exchange students, number of joint publications; these are some examples of matrices which are not

previously scrutinized but have surfaced to be the core of internationalization. Further, the need to provide evidence in support of these indicators required systematic planning to elicit evidence, extract data and publicize. Visibility is at the very heart of this process. Incentivizing faculties towards achievement these indicators required new schemes including financial incentives for research publication.

There are evident challenges that Villa College faces. One of the most apparent obstacles is the absence of arrangements for international student visas. Another significant but indirect hindrance is the barrier for Villa College to achieve university status. As a crucial qualifier, Maldives Higher Education Act 7/2021 stipulates that any HE institution in Maldives must operate as a college for at least twenty years before applying for university status. Villa College, having been in operation for sixteen years, falls short of meeting this requirement. Despite academic progress and recognition, the attainment of university status cannot be expedited. This limitation hinders the institution's ability to affiliate and offer joint programs, particularly in the realm of doctoral programs, whether the institution's own or those of affiliated, are barred. The attractiveness of international students is further depleted for the same reason.

Rethinking the processes

Global accreditation of programs and internationalization required a rethinking in the processes. There was an imminent need to align the academic processes of the institution with available global standards. These standards came through various bodies such as ENQA and QAA.

Villa College undertook revision of many of its processes in light of these standards. This initiative aims to ensure that these processes align seamlessly with established global standards. This includes revision of the guidelines for program development and review Quality enhancement structures are further being improved to match the expectations outlined by these accrediting bodies.

Capacity building, capacity building, capacity building!

One of the biggest lessons from the SSAPI project and the institution's internationalization and accreditation journey is that there are no quick fixes. Capacity building is at the core of all the processes and matrices. Without it there is no lasting impact.

SSAPI project played a direct role in facilitating staff development at Villa College. Over sixty staff members directly benefited from the training programs. Faculty heads, program coordinators, and curriculum developers were exposed to the best practices of EU partners and other participating Asian partners. These practices include processes in the design of the programs, delivery, quality assurance and aspects of internationalisation. The Head of Quality Assurance actively participated in several of these training sessions, underscoring the commitment to fortifying institutional capabilities for enduring success.

Conclusion

Villa College has achieved some noteworthy progress in domains of accreditation and internationalisation, with some due credit owed to the SSAPI project.

The establishment of global alliances through the project serves as a crucial foundation, but it is essential to recognise that initiation is merely the beginning. The translation of bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) into tangible joint programs and facilitated mobility needs to be materialized. Furthermore, the links and collaborations established with EU partners need to be nurtured and sustained over time. In the context of a small island nation with a relatively young HE sector, any progress in these fronts is considered

significant progress. The ongoing commitment to building upon these foundations will be pivotal in ensuring the enduring success of Villa College in the global educational landscape.



The Maldives National University

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Advancing Quality and Pursuing Accreditation: The SSAPI Project's Impact on Maldives National University's Internationalization Journey

Introduction

The Maldives National University (MNU), established on 15th February 2011 following the endorsement of the Maldives National University Act by the President on 17th January 2011, aims to set a benchmark for academic excellence within the nation and the wider region. Committed to excelling as an esteemed academic institution, MNU focuses on generating, exploring, safeguarding, and disseminating knowledge essential for enriching lives, fostering cultural, social, and economic development while unwaveringly upholding the principles of an enduringly free and Islamic nation. MNU's primary objectives include providing vital higher education and training, conducting impactful scientific research with local and global implications, granting degrees and certifications, nurturing collaborative partnerships, optimizing university resources, championing Islamic Dhivehi traditions and values, and actively engaging in supportive activities integral to its core functions, thereby making substantial contributions to societal progress.

Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes / SSAPI (2021-2023) Project funded with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union provided essential assistance to the MNU, empowering the institution to pursue program accreditation and gain international recognition.

Capacity Building & Training

The initial training for MNU was conducted online. Following the preparation and the first online session, relevant staff from MNU were invited to attend training sessions in Bremen. Alongside the SSAPI team, senior management and pertinent staff participated in the Bremen training.

After the Bremen session, a workshop on the international accreditation of courses and internationalization was held on August 4th, 2022, for all heads of MNU. The workshop introduced the process of international accreditation of courses and internationalization. An overview of the accreditation questions explored in the SSAPI project was presented, and small working groups were formed to discuss reflections based on the accreditation questionnaire, focusing on:

- The process
- The learning
- The way forward

Each group developed a short report based on the SSAPI questions and gave a brief presentation. The workshop's evaluation was conducted at the conclusion of the heads' training.

Additionally, Professor Dr. Aseem Kinra from the University of Bremen delivered a keynote address on "Disruption Risks, Supply Chain Resilience, and the Future of Global Supply Chain Operations" at the MNU Theveli 5th International Conference 2022 held on August 22nd and 23rd, 2022, at MNU. Supported by the Strategic Support for Accreditation of Programs and Internationalization at South Asian Higher Education Institutes (SSAPI) Project, workshops were held on August 24th (Wednesday) and 25th (Thursday), 2022, from 09:30 to 13:00 at the MNU Central Administration, open to all staff. The sessions included

1. Research-Based Teaching held on Wednesday, August 24th, 2022; Room E4-09; FHTS BUILDING; 09:30 - 13:00.
2. Accreditation and Internationalization of Programs and Institutions held on Thursday, August 25th, 2022; Room E4-09; FHTS BUILDING; 09:30 - 13:00

and were conducted by Professor Kinra.

Concurrently with this project, MNU is undergoing accreditation by other agencies. Actions have been developed based on feedback from the SSAPI and other agencies. As such from October 2023 to October 2028, the Maldives National University secures international quality accreditation from the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

Conclusion

The project's formation of worldwide partnerships is a fundamental cornerstone, with MNU dedicated to upholding continuous improvement, international integration, and adherence to rigorous accreditation standards. The actions taken thus far have several potential outcomes that will be put into practice as time progresses.