

# INTERNATIONALIZATION DURING THE PANDEMIC: DRAWING A MODEL FROM INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OFFICER'S (IROs) EXPERIENCES<sup>MA</sup>.

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**ABSTRACT** The seven (7) International Relations Officers (IROs) from State Universities and Colleges who participated in this qualitative study were asked to describe their experiences throughout the pandemic in order to develop a model for how to begin and maintain internationalization. The researcher used qualitative analysis to evaluate the data in order to identify significant themes. These themes served as the foundation for the model, which consists of Link, Embed, and Internationalize (LEI). The model depicts a complex process that was used to launch and maintain internationalization even throughout the epidemic. The model can therefore serve as a guide for IROs who have just been designated.

**Keywords:** Internationalization, Pandemic, International relations officers (IROs)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines have different initiatives for internationalization. There are concerns about the "how and what" of internationalization. This constrained knowledge results in confusion and doubts, especially about starting and sustaining the programs. According to Halawani [1], institutions need to reflect on their educational mission when confronted with issues regarding internationalization. The author added the need to understand how internationalization will accomplish their academic assignments and resources in carrying out the strategies and other components that will help them. Misconceptions about internationalization still exist. But she added that several institutions are undertaking it even with the misunderstanding [2]. CHED has been reminding Philippine Higher Education Institutions to avoid fragmented internationalization activities. It is apparent that each institution has its priorities, and pursuing global collaborations demands seriousness and commitment.

Various models, strategies, and approaches have emerged [3, 1, 4, 5] that explained internationalization but limited have been drawn to guide internationalization key officials on how to start and sustain the activities especially when an unprecedented scenario happens, like the pandemic. Hence, this research was conceived to provide support and guidance to IROs as it would try to draw a model that would serve as a framework for navigating IROs' internationalization initiatives.

## 1. METHODOLOGY

Seven (7) International Relations Officers (IROs) from State Universities were selected to be the participants of the study. These IROs have been handling the international office even before the pandemic.

Thematic analysis was used to examine the semi-structured interview data. In order to find patterns and themes in the data, the verbatim transcriptions of the recorded interview were checked several times. The first phase in the analysis was to create initial codes, which were labels that were descriptively assigned to data segments with a specific meaning. The probable themes derived from these codes were then refined and examined in light of the complete data set.

Member verification was done with the participants to confirm the interpretations and themes of the research team had uncovered in order to make sure the data was accurate and credible.

Through this process, three themes were generated: 1. Link 2. Embed and 3. Internationalized.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The model which can be drawn from gathering the data is termed as Link Embed Internationalize (LEI) Model of Internationalization. This is timely and is relevant and helpful for IROs during this Pandemic. LEI are themes generated from the interview and can also be regarded as steps on how to start and sustain internationalization. The model is composed of arrows interconnecting from one component to the next.

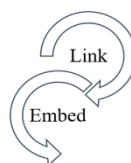
### Theme 1: Link



*We send new profiles, videos, and emails like Christmas greetings to our partners and future partners. We prepared promotional materials; if somebody inquires, we send promotional materials immediately. Its hard cause partners don't get to see you. It's good when you have friends outside; you can link with them Trust will not be an issue -IRO 3*

The link is the section where IROs introduce their universities and highlight their advantages and potential contributions to the collaboration. Being patient is necessary when linking since occasionally potential partners will not reply to the emails the IROs send. Linking is similar to the introduction stage where you must win over the partner's confidence and reassure them that any partnership would be mutually beneficial and that their contribution will be valued. Linking is difficult during the pandemic. However, by making an effort to do things like take part in international events, send faculty members abroad on scholarships, send students abroad for exchange and internship programs, publicize their university on a global scale, hold joint conferences, and invite experts to speak in webinars hosted by the school.

### Theme 2: Embed



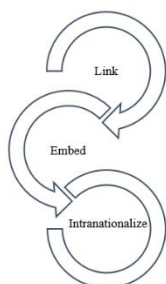
*Internationalization is both a process of a goal. Students must be on par with other graduates; you know the competition. Process because there*

*should be integration in the curriculum.*  
-IRO 6

*Integrating international, intercultural, and local dimensions in the university in terms of instruction and research. The university has this vision of being globally competitive, so I think we really had to strengthen our internationalization so in that 3 fold function of the university. internationalization should come in.*  
IRO 7

The university is then prepared to incorporate the international culture and integrate international dimensions in its teaching and learning endeavors. when institutions opt to work together as partners and on projects required for the "improvement" of their institutions. There is now an exchange of ideas, knowledge, and even values thanks to the integration of intercultural learning and knowledge into the academic environment. Internationalization of higher education is seen as a goal but also a way to raise the standard of instruction, according to Jibeen and Khan [6]. The researchers went on to say that the advantages of the internationalization of higher education include knowledge translation and acquisition, the mobilization of talent in support of international research, and the enchantment of the curriculum with foreign content.

### Theme 3: Internationalized



*We go on activities lined up for internationalization sharing best practices in the region. We are planning to have a student congress and let students of the area be aware of what internationalization is all about.* IRO 5

*We can form a partnership, we organize lecture series or conferences, I invite our international partner, and you invite yours. That is a good start.* IRO 3-I

When this partnership is thriving and starting to bear fruits, the university's global reputation will improve, thereby causing fame and status to enhance. While the pandemic has made some SUC struggle to look for international partners, this research believes that these successful universities must help others. As the saying "With great power comes great responsibility," connecting with fellow PHEIs will undoubtedly uplift the Philippines' higher education's internationalization.

Before the pandemic competition was extreme. It was hard to manage home-based and cross-border internationalization. As Cinches [7] mentioned,

internationalization has increased asymmetrically among HEIs during the past decades. Altbach [8] noted that international activities have expanded in universities regarding volume, scope, and complexity.

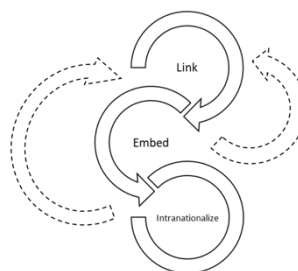
The word "internationalization" would be used to describe this component. This works on a straightforward principle. Internationalization is the sharing of local culture and ideas, while internationalization is the connection and embedding of the "international" culture and knowledge of other nations. The word "internationalization" is made up of the prefixes inter-, which denotes between and among like people and nations, and intra-, which means "within." Words like trans locality and trans localization have been used before. Intranational is not a new word. Merriam dictionary defines this as being or occurring within a nation. It would be interesting to reintroduce the term, so others may appreciate how IROs keep afloat in their internationalization initiatives despite the Pandemic.

These IROs were able to review their strategy and programs as a result of some internationalization operations coming to a standstill due to COVID-19. Although the Pandemic has altered the direction of internationalization, IROs are still able to engage in some activities.

Although it had a significant impact, it also brought the SUCs together. In fact, local universities have begun to collaborate and form consortia as a result of CMO No. 4, s 2020 [9]. Additionally, it has changed how the IROs view domestic internationalization. Due to COVID-19, networking activities with the SUCs are also active if CHED qualifies them as collaborative activities with foreign HEIs.

However, the IROs consider internationalization as both a process and a goal. Even institutions that have attained the highest level of internationalization continue to hunt for partners and have even increased their reach and activity.

It is clear from the broken arrow from Internationalize to Link or from Embed to Link that this is not the conclusion. In other words, the office continues to link even after the university has begun incorporating internationalization practices, cultures, and activities. Each element is inextricably linked to the others.



This paradigm is cyclical and begins with the Link. IROs first work to establish connections abroad by promoting their universities to the world at large. After linking, the institution integrates global culture by upgrading the curriculum and the third and ultimately most important step is internationalization, which is highlighted during pandemics. This element is essential for the SUCs to work together to maintain and improve the system's quality. Additionally, because internationalization is a process rather than a final product, activities are ongoing as alliances are supported, bolstered, and flourished.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The Pandemic has altered how internationalization is proceeding. Although it had a huge impact, IROs were more creative, resilient, and open-minded as a result.

A straightforward model called "Link, Embed, and Internationalize" was developed from IROs' experiences during the suspension of physical movement. It can be used to launch and maintain actions for internationalization. Newly designated IROs occasionally struggle to understand how to handle internationalization, the model can be a good way how to handle the office.

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