

Challenges and Opportunities on Cross-cultural and Educational Immersion in ASEAN Countries: Basis for Strategic Management Model

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Abstract – Cross-border education is among the vital components that is brought about by globalizing the higher education. Project Cross-Border for Learning (CBoL) like the acronym itself as the Filipino word “SIBOL” which denotes the sprout of life mean that this is the beginning of a new milestone for the academic institution to open its doors for global opportunities. This opens the opportunity for cooperation projects, academic exchange programs, institutional networking as well as cross-cultural advancement initiatives. This paper aims to present the challenges and opportunities of the cross-border learning experience of MinSCAT on the first three years of implementation of Project CBoL. The perceptions of respondents composed of 20 MinSCAT faculty and key officials; and 15 Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism (TUCST) faculty and officials on the challenges and opportunities of cross-border education were analyzed using thematic content coding technique. The “a priori” and “in vivo” were adopted for making code frames. The results showed that several factors such as language barrier, cultural and ideological differences, resistance to change of stakeholders, impact to institutions, financial resources, governing board policies, as well as teaching, research and community services with global context pose challenges on the implementation of the Project CBoL. It also revealed that the MinSCAT and TUCST faculty viewed Project CBoL to bring global opportunities such as cross border intelligibility, exposure to diverse culture, faculty and official professional immersion and ASEAN integration.

Keywords – challenges, cross-border education, MinSCAT, opportunities, project cross-border for learning, qualitative research, TUCST

INTRODUCTION

The world is a big fish bowl of competitive professionals. In every country, these skilled and talented professionals pave the ways to marketability of the industries they are into. They are considered assets in their specific fields. Hence, only the worthy are absorbed by industries. Most industries rely not only on the educational attainment of graduates but also on the trainings and experiences. Corollary to this, cross-border education is an opportunity for knowledge, skills and technology transfer and exchange as well as cross-culture awareness and promotion. Thus, the immersion to a diverse culture in the different countries will be a great hands-on training for both professors and students.

The project answers and supports the vision of the ASEAN Economic Community as a part of the totality being one of its members. The AEC envisioned to forge cooperation and collaboration among higher education

institutions in the region. They encouraged collaborative and joint researches that may be beneficial in the region. They also open the doors for opportunity of exchange programs for students and personnel thus increasing student and workforce mobility.

Project Cross-Borders for Learning (CBoL) is a pioneering project of the Mindoro State College of Agriculture and Technology (MinSCAT) and Thanh Hoa University of Culture, Sports and Tourism (TUCST) to establish international partnership and linkages to different foreign colleges and allow its professors and students to have academic and professional experiences in the global perspectives through educators and students cultural and professional immersion and exchange program. This project aims to provide professors and students a grasp of what is really happening in the world at raw. This will enable cross-border learning among different

universities and colleges in the world. Professors and students will have exposures of the culture of other countries. Through an in-depth experience in another culture, they will be able to value, understand, and respect cultural differences and similarities; examine global issues that cross cultures and demonstrate effective communication skills to successfully interact with people of other cultures. Through this, professors and students may gain insights on the best practices that they can observe from both institutions that they have to assure success in their specific fields. They will understand deeply the global scenario far way beyond their comfort zone and learn to adjust for them to adapt in various workplaces. Exchange professors and students can experience their counterpart's functions as well as duties and understand what they have gone through. They can also share to their colleagues their experiences and be a living testimony of what is happening in other place beyond theirs. These academic institutions understood the numerous benefits of a strong international cooperation, to name few are the elevated scholarly prestige, enhanced capacity in acquiring knowledge as well as financial opportunity exposures. [1]-[2].

The Project Cross - Border for Learning (CBoL) like the acronyms itself as the Filipino word "SIBOL" which denotes the beginning of life mean that this is the beginning of the new life for MinSCAT to open its doors for global opportunities. MinSCAT has taken advantage of the signed a memorandum of agreement on academic cooperation for a period of five years between the Philippines, through the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, through the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET).

Cross-border tertiary education is not a new phenomenon as there is a long history of exchange of students, professors, and knowledge dating back centuries. However, in the last two decades the world witnessed significant growth in cross-border tertiary education in large part due to changes in physical and virtual modes of delivery. This has improved the undertone that cross-border tertiary education is more than just faculty or student exchange but is significantly more [3]. Academic institutions realized the need for cross-border education for it drives economic globalization, paradigm-shift of industrial society to a knowledge-based society as well as educational internationalization [4]. In addition to new ways to offer education many colleges and universities are changing their mission statements to include an

international focus. The majority of these institutions regard cross-border tertiary education as a dynamic approach to build mutual understanding, assist other countries in capacity development, generate revenue, and answer the need for an educated workforce in response to the demands of a globalized society [5]. The term "culture" deemed significant in a culturally attributed social interaction processes that is by themselves the result of socially constructed processes. [6].

Understanding the successful outcomes brought about by cross-border tertiary education, post numerous challenges and threats that is why these are also taken into consideration in offering such. Thus, in this paper, the challenges and opportunities posed by the project CBoL to both MinSCAT and TUCST will be discussed in an attempt to improve the cross-border for learning implementation and bring it to much greater heights of success.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to present and discuss the experience of MinSCAT with regards to the implementation of the Project Cross-Border for Learning (CBoL). Specifically, the study sought to describe the views of the MinSCAT and TUCST faculty regarding the challenges posed by the implementation of Project Cross-Border for Learning (CBoL); to determine the opportunities ascribed by the respondents to both cross-border partner institutions on the implementation of Project CBoL; and devised a strategic management model based on the findings of the study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative method of research was used in gathering and documenting the views and responses of the 20 MinSCAT faculty and key officials and 15 TUCST faculty and key officials regarding the implementation of the Project Cross-Border for Learning (CBoL) through triangulation method. Respondents were chosen using purposive sampling technique on the basis of their participation on the project as part of the delegation who visited the two institutions, expert faculty trainers, office personnel assigned to assist for the project and key officials of both institutions. The views and opinions of the respondents were written by each of the respondents on the questionnaire to ensure precision and accuracy of data collection. The "a priori" as well as "in vivo" codes were being adopted in the study to construct

coding frames, thematic content analysis was strategically used for the written responses of the respondents. These codes were distinguished from each other by which “a priori” were those with evident sense from the data while “in vivo” were those that have special or hidden meaning as perceived by the respondents [7]. The researcher validated the questionnaire used in the study through the help of three (3) experts from the academe with vast experiences on cross-border education, they examined the items and marked as to retain, improve or revise. The data were gathered through administration of questionnaires; those who were from MinSCAT were personally handed and explained by the researcher, their consent were sought and ensured the anonymity of their identities. The researcher went to Vietnam to administer the questionnaires to respondents from TUCST, they were asked to be gathered in a specific venue wherein the researcher sought help from an interpreter to explain every information to them and the confidentiality of their responses and identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges for Project CBoL

The challenges faced by both institutions in the implementation of the Project CBoL were the perceived issues and concerns of the respondents of the study that were categorized into language barrier, cultural and ideological differences, resistance to change of stakeholders, impact to both institutions, financial resources, governing policies and teaching, research and community services with global context.

Language Barrier

Language serves as means for expressing one’s opinions, emotions and feelings, thus vital to one’s self-identity [8]. Intensified globalization is driving an increasing number of entrepreneurs, educators and individuals to interact across linguistic boundaries [9]. It is widely known that language affects almost all key aspects of life, thus, language barrier is something that needs to be settled among ASEAN countries and other countries worldwide. This issue is particularly critical during cross-cultural educational encounters.

Most of the respondents stressed that English is considered a secondary language on both countries and thus widely used as a medium of instruction and that they find it necessary to learn the language. For them, this fact makes language barrier not a great challenge for the implementation of the CBoL project. One of the

respondents quoted that *“English is taught commonly in universities in Vietnam and lecturers and experts from both Vietnam and Philippines use English to teach. Therefore, language is not a challenge for the project.”* Another respondent mentioned that *“Philippines is considered as an English-speaking country and Filipinos are known to be good communicators and can easily get along with the Vietnamese groups”*.

Though some mentioned that language is not a barrier for the project, some find it difficult to communicate on both verbal and written since they were not used to speak the language. One respondent said that *“English is not completely popular in Vietnam, but considered as just a foreign language. However, language is only a minor barrier for teachers attending the project.”* Another respondent mentioned that *“The difficulty lies on understanding the accent and pronunciation of other participants, some words are uttered differently that makes it a little of an issue.”* But one of the respondents stressed out that language seemed to be a big challenge as quoted *“English is a big barrier, as a chef I don’t (have) much concern about (the English) language that’s why I get some difficulty when I joined the project.”* This was further emphasized by another respondent and quoted that *“English is not very popular in Vietnam, especially, (if) you work as a chef. So language is a big difficulty.”* And by another respondent which said that *“Some Filipino and English technical terms like in medicine, kitchen equipment, name of food, menu and procedures cannot be easily translated in Vietnamese language thus, it takes time to explain it to some members of the group.”* Another respondent said that *“In (the) Philippines, English is widely used; therefore, it is not a challenge for the lecturers and experts sent to train and research here. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, English is taught as a second language, so a number of lecturers still struggle to use it. However, the institution can send assistants to support them”*.

Cultural and ideological differences

Differences between people within any country or culture are greater than differences between groups. Human behavior and cultural orientation were being affected by lot of factors such as educational attainment, social status, religious preferences, personality, belief and customs as well as experiences. There are cultural and ideological differences and it is worthy to have an understanding about such. In analyzing cross-cultural differences, it is not treated

individually but rather comparing one ethnic group to the other [10]. Stereotyping have some adverse effects when participation were not expected by educators or top-level management to involve themselves [11].

The respondents perceived that there might be some differences between Filipinos and Vietnamese in terms of culture and ideological preferences but commonly settled as not a big deal in the project. The respondent quoted that *“There are some differences about culture and ideology between Vietnam and the Philippines but we were received enthusiastically by our Filipino friends so it is not much of an issue when we stay in MinSCAT”*, that is being reiterated by the quote of another respondent that *“There are no big gaps in culture and way of thinking between Philippines and Vietnam. As a result, lecturers and experts chosen for the project find no difficulty in getting familiar with the teaching and living environment in both countries.”* A respondent also mentioned that *“We do not look much on the difference between us, but rather, we find ways to settle it and focus more on our similarities, treating each other as siblings.”* Other respondent uttered that *“Both countries are quite unique but can easily adapt with the environment, Filipino value on resiliency is of use when being in other country.”*

On the other hand, there are some respondents who thought that there are some challenges that they have encountered on cultural and ideological differences. Like what this respondent said that *“There are no big differences in culture between Philippines and Vietnam, except for food. During (my) one month of participation (for) the project, I found it hard to get familiar with the food in Philippines.”* A Filipino participant also felt this difference and quoted this when asked *“I find the culture between two countries almost the same, my only issue is the difference in food preparation and preference, there is something peculiar about the taste that my palate cannot understand but edible though.”* Another respondent quoted that *“The difficulty I encountered is that difference in terms of religion, it is not easy to find a church to attend mass when I am Vietnam, I just prayed by myself in my room.”*

Resistance to change of stakeholders

Organizations perceive change as significant for its existence and affluence in today’s most competitive environment and new professional challenges. They make change initiative to keep up the pace with changing environment and new challenging

competition. The success and performance superiority of organizations are now dependent on its ability to align its internal arrangement with the demand of external world [12]. Resistance to change is often cited as a main factor contributing to failures of organizational change. This is attributed to lack of commitment, leadership inaction, inadequate planning, and failure to identify the real reason for change, are among the long list of factors that are acknowledged as contributors to organizational change failures. Constant communication and encouraged participation are known to give positive results in managing change and resistance [13].

The respondents who have been a part of the Project CBoL felt that they embrace the change for such change contributes to the growth and progress of the institutions and making the institution more adaptive to the ASEAN integration. Some of the respondents cited that they feel that *“All the stakeholders are willing to change, and adjust to the new environment”*, other said that *“The stakeholders are not reluctant to change to be abreast of the new global context”* and reiterated by this quote that *“When a change proposed is properly explained to the stakeholders, they can accept it especially when they feel that they were involved and consulted, they have the sense of ownership to the project.”*

Though there are some of the respondents who felt the contrary and quoted that *“When the project was introduced, I felt skeptical as to the benefit it will bring to MinSCAT, but in the long run, I believed that this will bring us to greater heights.”* Another respondent said that *“Acceptance is sometimes difficult to other people and hesitant to leave their comfort zones but when they know how things work, they can somehow accept it.”*

Impact to both institutions

Understanding the impact of the Project CBoL to both institutions in terms of cross-culture exposure and communication as well as educational and professional immersion is imperative for both MinSCAT and TUCST seeking to create a competitive advantage in the global context. Some impact can be in terms of the attitudes and motivation of faculty and students towards the project while others are on opportunity to explore more beyond the boundaries of the existing organization. As to provide learning and development opportunities for both institutions’ faculty and student to ensure that they be abreast of what is expected from them. There is always a need for valuing the

impact and benefit of international cooperation between and among higher education institutions and beyond [14].

As perceived by the respondents, most of them believed that there are positive impact on both institutions as one said that *“I believe one of the major positive impacts of the project to both institution is the creation of an environment by which enables everyone to explore knowledge, culture and learning beyond the walls of the school. It is technically bringing about a piece of Vietnam and Philippines in each institution and has a chance for a peek of each side.”* Another respondent mentioned that *“The thought of how important English is in communicating with others is one of the realizations the project participants have gained out of it. They are starting to give value the language and believed that even how brilliant and charismatic you are, it will be of no use if you cannot articulate it.”* One interesting quote from the respondent is *“The impact is more personal that professional, after the immersion it made me realizes that the project is not only a (mere) academic partnership but it is friendship; you found a home away from home.”* Some respondents said that *“There are no negative impact to both institutions has been found during the implementation of the project but rather positive to some extent.”*

There are some respondents who have perceived that the impact to both institutions were still not felt and mentioned that *“The impact on both institutions may be realized when the change has been done, might be in years more or decade”* and that *“The impact to both institutions is gradually happening and will be concrete in few years to come.”*

Financial resources

Academic institutions and organizations recognizes financial management through tapping employees, parents, stakeholders and other members of the community for support and the initiative to work together for quality education. In this respect, finance resources should include aspects such as drawing up College-wide or University-wide financial policy; setting up a structure within the institution to handle administrative and financial matters; delegating certain functions to frontlines, faculty and the officials; and established partners [15]-[16]. The financial planning of institutional finances and its control are interdependent and closely linked with each other as noted by Ntseto [16]. With the meager budget and subsidies by the government with MinSCAT and

TUCST as state educational Institutions, Project CBoL faces challenges on financial resources.

As perceived by the respondents, that somehow financial resources are a challenge but since *“Full support has been provided for the project. So, there is no challenge for the participant to attend the project in terms of finances.”* and *“All the accommodation, food and allowances are provided; hence, there is no obstacle in processing (of) the project.”* There is a respondent who mentioned that *“Financing the project was a challenge before but not anymore, both institution felt the need for the implementation of the project thus provide allocation to commence the activities and programs of Project CBoL”.*

There are also some respondents that sees financial resources seemed to be a challenge and mentioned that *“Financial resources for Project CBoL is limited”, “The financial constraints limit us to the number of delegates to participate in the project, government budget is still meager and sometimes participants are burdened to their own expense”* and *“The return of investment is somehow considered in the project but the return is more intangible than monetary.”*

Governing Policies

Higher education is characterized by what policy analysts refer to as information asymmetry, i.e., consumers rarely possess full information on the quality of higher education programs [17]. The governing policies that both institutions were bounded as state-owned were based on some regulatory agencies in the case of the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) regulates the international linkage policies while in Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is responsible for the issuance of educational policies. The Philippine government work for enabling every youth has access to education, this is one of the key features of regulating environment for education. Compared with ASEAN neighbors, the Philippines strategizes a comprehensive TNE for foreign HEIs [18].

The respondent perceived that the success of the project brought about positive regard in policy-making bodies and they mentioned that *“Policy-makers support and give the participants a best condition to join the project to help them to improve their language and professional skills”, “The institutions has completed all necessary document prior to the commence of the project, thus, there is a smooth implementation”* and *“The policies of governing board*

are also favorable for the implementation of the project.”

On the other hand, some respondents pointed out that “*The project has a lot of room for improvement but some policies hinders it like the possibility of transnational education (TNE) on 2+2 programs on parallel programs in Hospitality and Tourism Management and Education*”, “*The rigid process for seeking approval from governing bodies can somewhat delay the implementation of the project*” and “*The governing board members are constantly changing and some members are a little skeptical with the project.*”

Teaching, research and community services with global context

The challenge faced by educational institutions is to take the lead in the creation of generally robust knowledge in both its teaching and research dimensions [19]. Knowledge production transcends national boundaries requiring membership of global networks and opening the doors to cooperation among universities and colleges around the world. [14].

The respondent perceived that the challenge on teaching, research and community services with global context was not much of a challenge. The respondent mentioned that “*Teaching, research and community services with global context are a bit challenging for the participants. However, thanks to the support of the institution, it took just a small amount of time for all the participants to catch up with the differences*”, “*All the lecturers and experts are carefully chosen for the project; therefore, it is not difficult to catch up with teaching, research and community services with global context*”, “*The arising need for leveled-up teaching and research is considered the driving force to pursue in this project*” and “*Teaching, research and community services in a different country, in a totally different context seemed strange to me at the beginning. However, thanks to the differences, I could learn new things, absorb strong points, and then improve what we were having. So, on second thought, these differences are very beneficial instead of being challenges*”.

On the other hand, respondents also believed that teaching, research and community services with global context are indeed a challenge. Highlights of the respondents perceptions were that “*The lecturers and experts (participants) of the project must adapt to fit global context in a short amount of time, which is considered as a challenge for the participants*”, “*The maturity of research and the research culture on both*

institutions were not parallel and thus posed a challenge on undertaking joint and collaborative research” and “*Community services with global context is considered a challenge on both institutions due to language barrier and cultural differences*”.

Opportunities brought by Project CBoL

The opportunities discussed in this study are the other dimension of the project by which resulted from commencing the project outside its defined objectives and goals. The opportunities were categorized as cross border intelligibility, exposure to diverse culture, faculty and official professional immersion and ASEAN Integration.

Cross border intelligibility

In this study, cross border intelligibility refers to capability of the Project CBoL participants to understand the beliefs, language and culture between Philippines and Vietnam. Intelligibility is the degree to which individual differences is understood by others and to be intelligible is a primary goal of communication [20]. Evaluating intelligibility in this context is complex because intelligibility necessarily includes environmental and subjective factors [21].

The respondents perceived that cross border intelligibility is a great opportunity for both institutions and their responses were “*The lecturers and experts who participate the project are brought huge opportunities to better understand the beliefs, language and cultures between Philippines and Vietnam*”, “*The participants of the project can better understand the culture between Philippines and Vietnam, which expands their knowledge and enrich their real (world) experiences in a new country*”, “*The project is a big opportunity for the participants (who) have been sent to both countries to live and teach, which is a chance for them to experience and have better understanding of the culture (eg. food, beliefs, language). It is also a tool to develop intellectually mature communities for each to be globally competitive*” and “*The cross border intelligibility in the sense is an opportunity to be taken advantage since immersion to both institutions enables participant to understand the cultural and individual differences of people from two countries*”.

Exposure to diverse culture

The world today has been increasingly diverse. People have different cultures, religions, languages and many others. Thus, cross-border learning helps to build relationship with diverse people and helps to gain

different perspective and understanding of their cultures. [22]. In working towards more diverse organization or community there is much more to do. This aspect of opportunity is being about awareness of culture, build relationships with from different cultures, become allies to people, build multicultural organizations and coalitions, and complex community of learners.

The respondents acknowledge this opportunity and perceived that *“It makes sense that diversity within a workplace could help to lead to brand new ideas for educational institutions. I feel like greater diversity could lead to more acceptance and innovation. It is like a fresh perspective is necessary for TUCST and MinSCAT to flourish these days”, “Since a diverse culture gives us a broader range of experience, expertise, and working methods it is likely to have greater opportunity to improve both personally and professionally”* and *“Both Philippines and Vietnam are two diverse cultures in Asia; therefore, the project has brought the participants the chance to expose and experience these cultures, which contributes to shorten and address the gap between cultures.”*

Faculty and official professional immersion

The immersion will give faculty and officials a concrete understanding and appreciation of the expectations and demands of higher education institutions from professionals, and can therefore prepare and equip the students and employees accordingly. Likewise, the program serves as an avenue by which the faculty and officials can evaluate their competences with respect to that of other institution in the industry; after which necessary support from the College can be solicited to address any need for additional capability enhancements and training.

The respondents of the study sees these good opportunity and mentioned that *“The project helps the participants have chance to experience advanced educational environment. The participants of the project have totally immersed in the new environment during the time of teaching, researching in both Vietnam and Philippines”, “The lecturers and participants are considered as an official part of the faculty. This big opportunity can help them to deeply understand what is going on inside the academe and absorb strong points inside the organization”* and *“The officials and lecturers participating the project have been considered as member of the faculty and immersed in the official professional environment. As*

a result, these participants enriched their academic, practical know-how and then come back and contribute to the development of the institute in general and the faculty in particular.”

ASEAN Integration

ASEAN integration presents various opportunities among the member nations in terms of economic development. The intangible manifestation that ASEAN economic integration is successfully implemented were its influenced the labor market that results to inclusive growth and to uplift of people’s lives [23]. In the forthcoming ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), the responsibility of education is to make the lives of as many people as possible better, to help make sure no one gets left behind, and everyone is prepared to face the opportunities and challenges of the regional economy. In the context of the AEC, this means helping all our peoples benefit from the opening regional economy and helping ensure that no one gets left behind. The best way for the education system to do this is to enhance the employability of our youth, which will only happen if business and educational institutions come together to shape, design and jointly deliver academic and training programs [24]. With this, the project opens the door for opportunity to the MinSCAT and TUCST family.

The respondents perceived the opportunity the ASEAN integration brought about many opportunities taking advantage the Project CBoL, some of them said that *“ASEAN integration creates favorable conditions for the implementation of the project”, “The ASEAN integration is an opportunity for the project to be successful and attain its sustainability, this will offer movement of faculty and students and even job opportunities”* and *“Opening of the countries under ASEAN will pose a good opportunity for the project since this will pave the way for endless possibilities”*.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are lot of challenges and opportunities that we will come across with in the pursuit of excellence. There is much to be gained by observing how people of the diverse culture interact with each other. The challenges of the Project Cross-Border for Learning (CBoL) as viewed by the respondents were categorized by the most common responses yielded through the accomplished questionnaire. The respondents perceived that the major challenges faced by the project are language barrier; resistance to change by some members of the organization; the governing policies of

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT MODEL

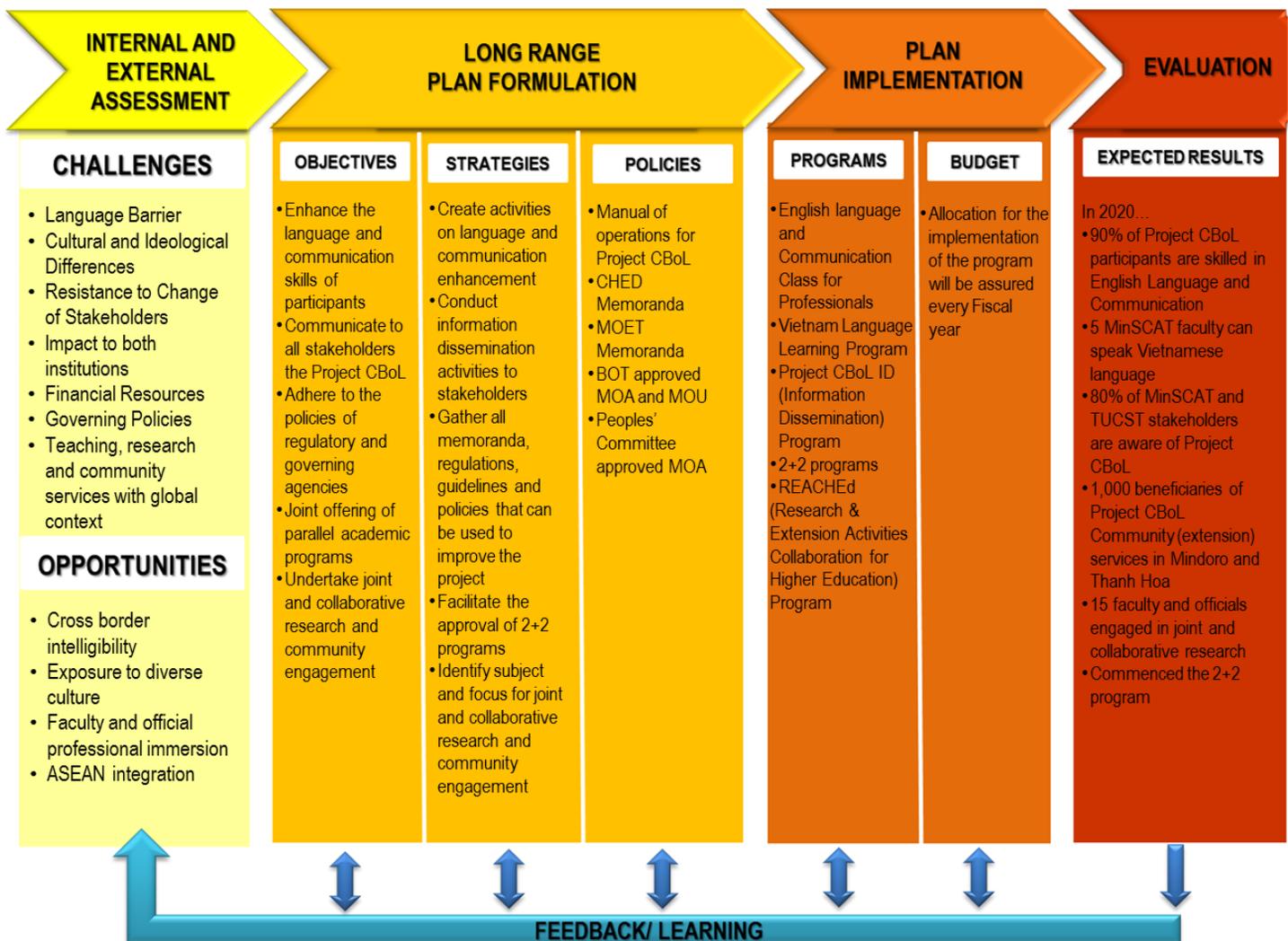


Figure 1. Project Management Intervention

regulatory boards and agencies; and teaching, research and community services in global context.

They believed that impact to both institutions and financial resources are minor challenges that can be tolerated. The opportunities perceived by the respondents were also categorized based on the given responses as to cross border intelligibility, exposure to diverse culture, faculty and official professional immersion and ASEAN Integration.

The researcher therefore recommends that activities under the Project Cross-border for learning needs to be revisited with the following focus on strengthen language and communication skills development of the

participants; conduct of special training and capability building by TUCST on the use of English Language in teaching and learning; sending people who has direct involvement to the project to learn the Vietnamese language; information dissemination about the project to all the members of the organization to curtail resistance to change; adherence to regulatory boards and governing agencies' policies; and reinforced conduct of joint and collaborative research and community involvement. Moreover, quantitative analysis of the challenges and opportunities on cross-cultural and educational immersion in ASEAN Countries can be further investigated in future studies.

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT MODEL

The strategic management model in Figure 1 is project management intervention to ensure the success of Project Cross-Border for Learning based on the assted challenges and opportunities of the respondents of the study. The arrows in leftward direction denote that the different items contribute to the expected results of the Project. Every aspect of the program underwrites to feedback and learning.

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