

EMBRACING CHANGE AND SUSTAINING THE MISSION OF CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE POST PANDEMIC ERA THROUGH MEANINGFUL COLLABORATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Covid 19 pandemic has thrown Catholic higher educational institutions (CHEI) in the Philippines in a state of disequilibrium. These institutions have to grapple with the threat of closure because of the exodus of learners to government schools and the steep decline in enrollment. The challenges brought about by the pandemic cannot be faced by individual CHEIs, rather they can only be surmounted through dialogue, collaborative efforts and true expressions of solidarity. The forging of organizational linkages through collaborations or partnerships is a strategy that can advance their educational mission towards the integral development of graduates and their appropriate professional placement in the world of work. It is the interest of this descriptive study to explore the collaborative engagements of Catholic HEIs with other social institutions/organizations in the different areas of educational mission using a survey instrument. It also looks into how these collaborations impact the three pillars upon which CHEIs are built, namely, instruction, research and community engagement. This study provided a better way of appreciating the situation of Catholic HEI in the Philippines and pathways in exploring innovations for greater collaboration that will guide CHEIs in navigating the changes and challenges of sustaining viability and vitality in the post pandemic era.

Keyword: Catholic Higher Educational Institutions; collaboration; training; research; community engagement

INTRODUCTION

The COVID 19 pandemic has disrupted the operations and even viability of educational institutions both at the local and international arena. Data provided by *The Global Catholic Education Report 2020*, states that as of mid-April, at least 1.6 billion students were affected by the closures, including those enrolled in Catholic schools (Woodon, 2020, p.14). In the Philippines, the Coordinating Council

for Private Educational Association (COCOPEA), citing statistics from the Department of Education, claimed that as of September, 2020, 865 schools are temporarily ceasing operations a number of these are Catholic schools), inadvertently affecting more than 58,000 learners and over 4,000 teachers.

The difficulties of institutions in coping with the pandemic and even in the post pandemic era cannot be addressed by independent effort. Indeed, in addressing

issues, there is need for those charged with assisting private higher education in achieving optimal growth to consider tertiary education in its entirety and not universities, technical institutions, colleges and tertiary TVET institutions in an isolated way (WB, 2020). One pervasive insight borne of this experience of struggle is the need for dialogue, collaborative efforts and true expressions of solidarity.

The post pandemic era is an opportune time for Catholic higher educational institutions to explore building greater solidarities within its own network. As the schools collectively face the problem of survival and of innovating to find new processes, methodologies and even courses – there is an invitation for them (schools) to come together, to share resources, and to discover synergies that come from collaborating more closely.

This study adopts a preconditions-process-outcome model as the theoretical-foundational basis. The model initially developed by Wood and Grey (1991) posits that preconditions such as scarcity of resources and interdependence enable the collaboration to occur, since they motivate and encourage stakeholders to participate in collaborative activities. It is quite obvious that small CHEIs are not big enough to put in place changes and innovations that the post pandemic era requires in order to sustain their trajectory towards quality Catholic education, clearing the path for collaboration to take place. On the other hand, process represents the structure as to how collaboration is undertaken. It is the area of process where the values of trust and reciprocity are deemed essential. These two values engender in institutions a strong sense of duty towards each other since these are founded on the intent to make good sense of mutual exchange (Thomson,

et.al, 2007). Trust is important in inter-organizational collaboration because it brings about positive effects on collaborative engagements since it can act as a substitute for contract and reduce costly governance mechanisms for as long as it is well entrenched in both parties (Stuart, 2012). While it is not so easy to create a culture of trust (and reciprocity), Dyer and Chu (2011) believed that trust in inter-organizational collaboration can be constructed around three components: reliability, fairness and goodwill. Reliability means the ability of both parties to make good faith or sincere decisions in accordance to agreed-upon commitments. Fairness relates to the capacity of either one or both parties to execute actions or adjustments based on impartial or equitable decisions. Goodwill refers to the quality of “being honest” or having pure intent so one party does not seize the opportunity to take advantage of the other even when there is a good chance to do so.

Finally, outcome looks into the desired expected results of the collaborative process. One important consideration about collaborative outcome is the generation of policies. and the extent of innovativeness of the generated policies (Wood et al, 1991) as well as how well the collaborative engagement is able to address whatever problems or challenges institutions are facing (Hood, et, al, 1992).

The value of collaboration and dialogue, especially in extreme situations such as the pandemic and the post pandemic era cannot be undermined. The brief discussion on the benefits of collaboration should lead CHEIs to tread this pathway for viability and vitality. However, before this could even transpire there is a need to measure the extent of CHEIs use of collaboration as a mechanism that infuses vitality into its instruction,

research and community engagement. Specifically, this study aims to:

1. describe the profile of CHEIs which have established joint or collaborative engagements with other major social organizations relative to those who have none;
2. determine which of the three pillars of CHEIs – instruction, research and community engagement benefit the most from collaborations.
3. come up with recommendations on pathways for strengthening collaboration amongst CEAP HEIs and other HEIs in various localities.

METHODOLOGY

This study is plainly descriptive. It aims mainly to describe the situation or characteristics of the population, event or situation being studied. Hence, it is a method of inquiry that generally focuses on the “what” more than the “why” of the research subject.

A type of descriptive research method that was used in this study is the survey. Apart from the objective of gathering quantifiable data from a sample drawn from a large population, a survey research also intends to retrieve data that can be subjected to statistical analysis.

From the total population of 315 Catholic Higher Education Institutions (CHEI) in the country (all members of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines), 176 constituted the samples in this study. The schools (colleges and universities) that have formed part of this sample were randomly drawn from an official listing of member-schools. They also proportionately represented the different types of CHEIs namely, Diocesan, Congregational, Privately-owned (Non-stock/non-profit), Privately-owned (stock/profit-based), Privately-owned

(unspecified whether non -stock/non-profit or not).

The Sloven’s formula was used to arrive at the sample size with margin of error set at 5% (or equivalent to 95% level of confidence). Ideally while the study is set to retrieve the desired sample size, the uncertainty of the situation brought by the pandemic has delayed the schedule and timelines for gathering the accomplished survey instrument. For this reason, the total retrieved survey forms (despite the extension of the deadline of submission given to respondent-schools) is 123 (or equivalent to 70% of the sample population).

The tool used for data collection that is quite common to descriptive quantitative researches is the self-administered survey questionnaire. To gather data from respondents, this tool is mostly made up of close-ended questions (meaning questions that provide some fixed choices or alternative responses from a given list) and a few open-ended ones that are better asked in that manner.

In this time of the Covid 19 pandemic, a survey questionnaire was administered online as a better, safer option in gathering data. In order to incorporate the necessary adjustments or modifications to the instrument and plan out the most efficient strategy for its actual administration, said instrument was pre-tested a couple of weeks before it was distributed online to the randomly selected respondent-schools.

In view of pursuing the study objectives, this survey instrument contains salient questions that deal with partnerships or links respondent-CHEI have established with the following categories of institutions: local government units (LGUs) and national government institutions, other Catholic HEI,

Private/Non-Sectarian HEI, Private/Sectarian (Non-Catholic) HEI, Public/State-run HEI, local church (parishes and dioceses), religious communities/congregations, non-government organizations and civil society organizations. The study hopes to bring to light how Catholic schools have made earnest efforts to make their presence actively felt (or conversely, need to exert more effort in bearing positive influence) on areas of institutional engagements where they can help promote growth in knowledge, values and technical competence for society's total flourishing. These efforts may be gleaned from what data may reveal based on questions pertaining to collaborative activities or linkages in the fields of training and formation, research, community service and advocacy.

The data gathered in this study were mostly quantitative and in as much as the study aims mainly to describe the status of CHEIs, the tools that lend themselves well for such description are tools of simple statistical data analysis like frequency counts and relative or percentage distributions, means or averages.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data gathered from the respondents provide the descriptive profile of CHEIs which have established joint or collaborative engagements with other major social organizations relative to those who have none. Found in separate tables are the data on areas of formal collaborative engagements the CHEI have established: training, research, community engagement and advocacy.

- *Formal Collaborations with Other Higher Educational Institutions*

Ex Corde Ecclesiae does not simply talk about collaboration among CHEIs and other higher educational institutions. This collaboration, which it terms as cooperation is one of the General Norms it has laid down. These General norms, according to Ex Corde Ecclesiae, are based on, and are a further development of, the Code of Canon Law and the complementary Church legislation and are valid for all Catholic Universities and other Catholic Institutes of Higher Studies throughout the world (ECE, Art. 1,1). Article 7, section 1 of these General Norms is given the title *Cooperation*. In this section Ex Corde stresses the need to promote regional, national and international cooperation in research, teaching and other university activities among all Catholic Universities, including Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, between Catholic Universities and other Universities. Tables 12, and 13 provide data that seek to validate whether this particular General Norm in Ex Corde Ecclesiae is adhered to by CHEI respondents to this study.

Catholic higher education institutions are also linked through partnerships with other higher educational institutions regardless of type: Catholic, Private Non-Sectarian, Private Sectarian (Non-Catholic) and Public State-run HEI. It is interesting to note however, that while there are more partnership projects contracted by CHEIs with agencies of national government and LGU as denoted by the significantly bigger number of those who responded "Yes", a bigger response rate of "NO or none" is noted when it comes to joint projects with other HEI. Would this be indicative of the concern of either one or both parties (CHEI and government/LGU) to reach out for a common ground of interest? However, if common interest is the basis for collaboration or cooperation,

as Ex Corde Ecclesiae terms, there is no reason why CHEIs will not collaborate with fellow CHEIs and other higher educational institutions. This is because any higher educational institution, whatever its type is aims at the integral development of learners even if they may be differentiated by the purpose for which they endeavor to

bring this about. Also, all higher educational institutions, by virtue of their being HEIs have to engage in instruction, research and community engagement. There are therefore varied opportunities for CHEIs to collaborate with their fellow CHEIs and with other HEIs.

Table 1: CHEIs with and without Collaborative Engagements with Other HEI

Categories of Other HEI	With Partnership		Without Partnership		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Catholic HEI	56	45.5	67	54.4	123	100.0
Private Non-Sectarian HEI	26	21.1	97	78.8	123	100.0
Private Sectarian Non-Catholic HEI	17	13.8	106	86.1	123	100.0
Public State-run HEI	33	26.8	90	73.1	123	100.0

Nonetheless looking at the types of engagements contracted by the CHEIs across different types of HEI, except for research which is the main interest in partnership with private/sectarian (non-Catholic) HEIs, training came to be the primary focus of partnerships between CHEI and other Catholic HEI, private/non-sectarian HEIs and State-run HEIs. It can be noted too that research ranked second in the order of concern for partnerships between

private/non-sectarian HEIs and state-run HEIs. This emerging pattern denotes that the function of HEIs (including Catholic HEI) remain largely in the sphere of training and research, which are carried over as focal interests in establishing collaborative engagements with other HEIs. It is observed though that in the case of partnerships with other Catholic HEIs, next to training as the overriding concern comes community service and then research.

Table 2: Areas of Collaborative Engagements with Other HEIs

Catholic HEI				Priv. Non-Sec. HEI				Priv. Sec. Non-Cath. HEI				State-run HEI			
Tr.	Res	CS	Ad	Tr.	Res	CS	Ad	Tr.	Res	CS	Ad	Tr.	Res	CS	Ad
53.	18.	20.	8.	60.	31.	6.	1.	34.	37.	20.	6.	45.	39.	4.	9.
3	3	0	3	6	1	5	6	4	9	6	9	7	7	8	6

- *Formal Collaborations with the Local Church: Parish and Diocese*

Catholic HEI must also be in service of the local church be it the parish or the diocese although not limited solely to its particular geographic insertion. It should be stressed that an academic institution which defines itself as "Catholic" such as a Catholic university is committed to the goal of formation of the people, men and women, who, in the academic context, are called to active participation in the life of the entire society and of the Church.

As the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* points out that “Every Catholic University, without ceasing to be a University, has a relationship to the Church that is essential to its institutional identity. As such, it participates most directly in the life of the local Church in which it is situated (n. 27). This relationship is deemed essential since CHEIs are established primarily to further the Church’s evangelizing mission. Furthermore, Article 5. Section 1 of the General Norms entitled, The Catholic University within the Church, states that, *Every Catholic University is to maintain communion with the universal Church and the Holy See; it is to be in close communion*

with the local Church and in particular with the diocesan Bishops of the region or nation in which it is located. In ways consistent with its nature as a University, a Catholic University will contribute to the Church's work of evangelization.

The aforesaid provisions of *Ex Corde* serve as bases for exploring the collaborative engagements between CHEI and the parish and CHEI and dioceses. The collaboration between CHEIs and the parish as well as the types of these collaborations are captured in Tables 14 and 15. Table 14 shows that 87 of the respondents or 70.7 per cent of them have collaborative engagements with parishes while 36 or 29.3 do not have. When it comes to the types of collaborative engagements, Table 15 shows that foremost among these engagements is service to the community (50%). This is perhaps because of the common call to which both responds to, that is service to the people of God. Another channel of care comes through training (39%) towards the enhancement of skills and competencies and then by advocacy which is perhaps seen as “taking the cudgels” on behalf of certain underprivileged groups or sectors whose cause needs to be espoused (8%).

Table 3: CHEI with and without Collaborative Engagements with Parishes

With Collaborative Engagements		Without Collaborative Engagements		Total	
f	%	f	%	f	%
87	70.7	36	29.3	123	100.0

Table 4: Areas of Collaborative Engagements with Parishes

Training		Research		Community Service		Advocacy	
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
112	38.75	8	2.77	145	50.2	29	8.3

Article 5 sections 2 and 3 of the General norms enshrined in Ex Corde Ecclesiae put a premium on the relationship between CHEIs and the diocese and the Bishop. These sections look at the responsibilities of both CHEI and the dioceses, thereby stressing the need for collaboration between the two. Section 2 categorically mandates that *each Bishop has a responsibility to promote the welfare of the Catholic Universities in his diocese and has the right and duty to watch over the preservation and strengthening of their Catholic character.* It further stipulates that *if problems should arise concerning this Catholic character, the local Bishop is to take the initiatives necessary to resolve the matter, working with the competent university authorities in accordance with established procedures.*

On the other hand, section 3 emphasizes the role of each Catholic in relation to the dioceses and the Bishops. It states that *periodically, each Catholic University, is to communicate relevant information about the University and its activities to the competent ecclesiastical Authority.* It further states that, *other Catholic Universities are to communicate this information to the Bishop of the diocese in which the principal seat of the Institution is located.*

Such relationship augurs well for the flourishing of collaborative engagements between CHEIs and dioceses. However, the data presented in Table 16 does not seem to indicate such. This is because more than half of the CHEIs, that is 53.7% do not have collaborative engagements with the diocese while only 46 per cent admit to having such.

Table 5: CHEI with and without Collaborative Engagements with Dioceses

With Collaborative Engagements		Without Collaborative Engagements		Total	
f	%	f	%	f	%
57	46.3	66	53.7	123	100.0

Data on the bigger ecclesial context of the diocese (with which CHEIs have also established collaborative engagements) also exhibit a similar pattern except that the engagement that seems to be most attractive for both institutions is training (42%) followed by community service (34%)

and advocacy (17%). Engagements in the area of research only got 6%. On the whole however, there are more formal collaborative ventures established between the CHEI and the parishes than there are between them and the dioceses.

Table 6: Areas of Collaborative Engagements with Dioceses

Training		Research		Community Service		Advocacy	
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
66	42.3	10	6.4	53	34.0	27	17.3

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has thrown educational institutions into a state of disequilibrium (Romero, 2020). This disequilibrium may hound them even in the post pandemic era. In fact, UNESCO asserts that, despite the fact that schools are already open in many countries, educational institutions still have to grapple with learning losses, health and well-being and drop out. One of the drivers for a sustainable recovery for schools, according to UNESCO, is the building of innovations and partnerships.

Catholic higher educational institutions can take consolation in the fact that disequilibrium, either internal or external, provides a powerful impetus for them to revisit their core (Macquillan et al, 2018). An essential element of this core is their being catholic. In its purest sense, being catholic impels CHEIs to reach out and collaborate with external agencies in the pursuit of its philosophy, vision, mission, goals and core values.

One of the defining characteristics of CHEIs enshrined in the Philippine Catholic School Standards for Higher Education (PCSS-HE) is that it is animated by a spirit of communion. This communion propels CHEIs to sustain and strengthen its collaboration in the work of faith formation, co-responsibility in societal transformation, and solidarity in human

development. This communion also moves CHEIS to actively engage parents and their families, alumni, other higher educational institutions and agencies, civil authorities, various industries and the corporate world, and other sectors of society in dynamic and meaningful partnerships for the common good (PCSS-HE, 2020, p.27). Furthermore, the PCSS-HE puts premium on collaboration by stating that a hallmark of an excellent CHEI is its commitment to establish functional and sustainable linkages with industries, government, non-government, Church and other organizations for integral learner development (PCSS-HE, 2020, p. 6).

While collaboration in this study is investigated under the lens of instruction, research, and community engagement, it should be stressed that for CHEIs, ultimate aim of collaboration is not only the desire to be among the list of elite educational institutions in terms of scholarship, but more importantly to bear witness to its calling of promoting and living out the truth and advancing the common good. PCSS-he stresses this when it says that The CHEI collaborates with the local and universal Church in the pursuit of and witness to the truth for the common good (p.43).

On the basis of this defining characteristic, the study delved on a descriptive profile of the CHEI with regard

to formal joint engagements they have established with other higher educational institutions, with the dioceses and parish along their major functions to society: training, research, community service and advocacy.

Except for research which is the main interest in partnership with private/sectarian (non-Catholic) HEI, training came to be the primary focus of partnerships between CHEI and other Catholic HEI, private/non-sectarian HEI and State-run HEI. Research ranked second in the order of concern for partnerships between private/non-sectarian HEI and state-run HEI. Such emerging pattern denotes that the function of HEI (including Catholic HEI) remain largely in the sphere of training and research, which are carried over as focal interests in establishing collaborative engagements with other HEI. Yet in the case of partnerships with other Catholic HEI, next to training as the overriding concern comes community service and then research.

Foremost among the collaborative engagements between CHEI and parishes is service to the community which are normally felt as channels of compassion and systematic care by the faithful constituents.

Following community service partnerships are training for competency enhancement and then by advocacy in view of promoting certain causes (literacy, livelihood, environment).

With regard CHEIs' collaborative engagements with dioceses, training seems to be most attractive for both institutions followed by community service and advocacy. It is noted that there are more formal collaborative ventures established between the CHEI and the parishes than there are between them and the dioceses.

On the basis of these findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. One of the realities pointed out in this study is that developing a more heightened awareness in research or stimulating a research climate in CHEIs is still a big challenge. Research if it is meant to be not an isolated activity but something integral to the movement of change for a better Church, and a better society, must be integral in the workings of CHEIs in its interdependent life with other institutions. In this light, it is recommended that The Catholic Educational Association, as an umbrella organization of Catholic educational institutions can initiate moves aimed at establishing the spirit of *communio* among CHEIs in the region or even across regions where those with more developed human and organizational capability can find the opportunity to reach out to those that are struggling.
2. Since the study provided baseline data on collaborations forged by CHEIs with other HEIs, the diocese and the parish, future researches will do well to assess or evaluate the impact of their collaborative engagements in the strengthening the Catholic identity and in the relentless pursuit of the CHEIs mission especially in the post pandemic era.
3. There are existing networks of educational institutions in the Philippines that are well established, at the regional and even national levels. Future researches can look into the experiences of collaborations of these enduring networks in the areas of instruction, research and

community engagement and the contributing factors to their endurance. These researches can also focus on how their collaborations are translated into development policies or programs that bring about renewed vitality to the member institutions.

4. Future researches may also consider how collaborations provide the needed impetus for CHEIs to create and sustain ecosystems of education where universities can work together not in a linear way, but in a way that facilitates students moving between structures (Harmon, 2021). This research may include probing into the processes and structures within the collaborative network that strengthen and sustain CHEIs commitment to being catalysts for growth and development. This research will bring into sharper focus the fact that a renewed emphasis on effective professional collaboration becomes even more imperative in the post pandemic era since it not only provides opportunities for CHEIs to embed the lessons learned during the pandemic but also to face the complex global socio-political contexts that the pandemic has spawned (Campbell, 2020).
5. Finally future researches may include a wider area of investigation that will probe into efforts of CHEIs at building collaborative networks with government institutions, local government units, civil society and non-government organizations and industry and how such create among the educational community an atmosphere conducive to the realization of vitality despite prevalent challenges. This recommendation

stems from the truth that the viability and vitality of CHEIs, especially during perilous times are also fostered when functional linkages are forged with these agencies.

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