



## A Policy Brief on CMO 15 s. 2019: Strategies for Enhancing Educational Research Productivity in Philippine Higher Education Institutions

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### ABSTRACT

The internationalization in higher education drives the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to release new Policies, Standards, and Guidelines for Graduate Programs, also known as CMO 15 s. 2019, wherein the "Publish, or No Degree" policy is implicitly stated. Furthermore, graduate education in the Philippines faces quality and research productivity challenges, as highlighted in the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) II report. Thus, this policy brief explores the educational research productivity in the Philippines using the lens of the international perspective and offers recommendations to strengthen the Philippine internationalization in higher education. The recommendations are divided into three parts: before (Rigorous Assessments based on the Institutional Admission Process Criteria), during (Implementing and Monitoring Research Practices; Strengthening Institutional Resources: Infrastructure, Funding, and Networks; and Engaged Pedagogy for Research Collaboration), and after (Evaluation of the Published Research). The Philippine government, through the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), must focus on talent cultivation by providing the necessary support system mechanisms to increase students' research productivity.

**Keywords:** *CHED Memo 15, EDCOM II, Graduate Education, Higher Education, Internationalization, Philippines, Teacher Education*

## INTRODUCTION

The "Publish, or No Degree" policy in higher education has become a crucial tool to propel graduates into the competitive world of research production, driven by the internationalization of higher education and the neoliberal agenda. In countries like China, the paranoia of publishing on the Web of Science, particularly in the Social Science Citation Index, is needed for the salvation of the faculty's promotion (Liu et al., 2020), resulting from being the leading contributor to the international higher education journals (Zhao et al., 2024). Nevertheless, researchers such as Lee (2014) have disagreed with evaluating "scholarliness" only based on indexes or journal impact factors instead of considering its impact on knowledge production and improvement of the field. Before the trend of the internationalization of higher education, students intended to enroll in graduate programs primarily for promotional purposes (McGrail et al., 2006).

The policy compelled students to publish their work in every available journal for compliance (Vaidyanathan, 2019), resulting in students feeling pressured to publish their work in a journal with questionable ethical standards (Mertkan et al., 2022). At the same time, the recent development of artificial intelligence has introduced a new concern about retracted articles that were peer-reviewed and published in a high-quality journal concerned with violating research ethics (Liverpool, 2023). Moreover, the highest number of retractions comes from non-native English-speaking countries such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Russia, China, Egypt, Malaysia, Iran, and India (Van Noorden, 2023).

### Philippine Context of the "Publish or

### No Degree Policy"

Undoubtedly, the internationalization movement of higher education is the leading cause of this policy change (Shamsi & Osam, 2022). Internationalization gained popularity in the early 2000s (Buckner, 2019), prompting the Philippines to adapt actively to the changing international landscape. The internationalization policy in Philippine higher education may be traced back to the Commission on Higher Education memo Order (CMO) No. 1 series of 2000, which served as the first documented policy guiding Philippine institutions about foreign partnerships (CHED, 2000). In 2016, the commission updated the previous policy to a more explicit one that included the notion of internationalization at home, the CMO no. 55 series of 2016 (CHED, 2016). In subsequent years, the government recognized the significance of internationalization in higher education, which led to a law to authorize transnational education legally, enabling Philippine universities to compete globally (Republic Act 11448, 2019). In response, the commission also released new guidelines (CMO no. 15 series of 2019) requiring all graduate students with a research component to publish an article (CHED Memo No. 15, 2019).

Despite the recent policy reforms, the Philippine government's report highlights areas in graduate education where there is room for improvement in generating high-quality research and enhancing overall academic standards (Second Congressional Commission on Education, 2024). Moreover, the Philippine education institutions failed to provide researchers with the necessary support due to their failure to recognize the root causes of the problem. Most Philippine universities

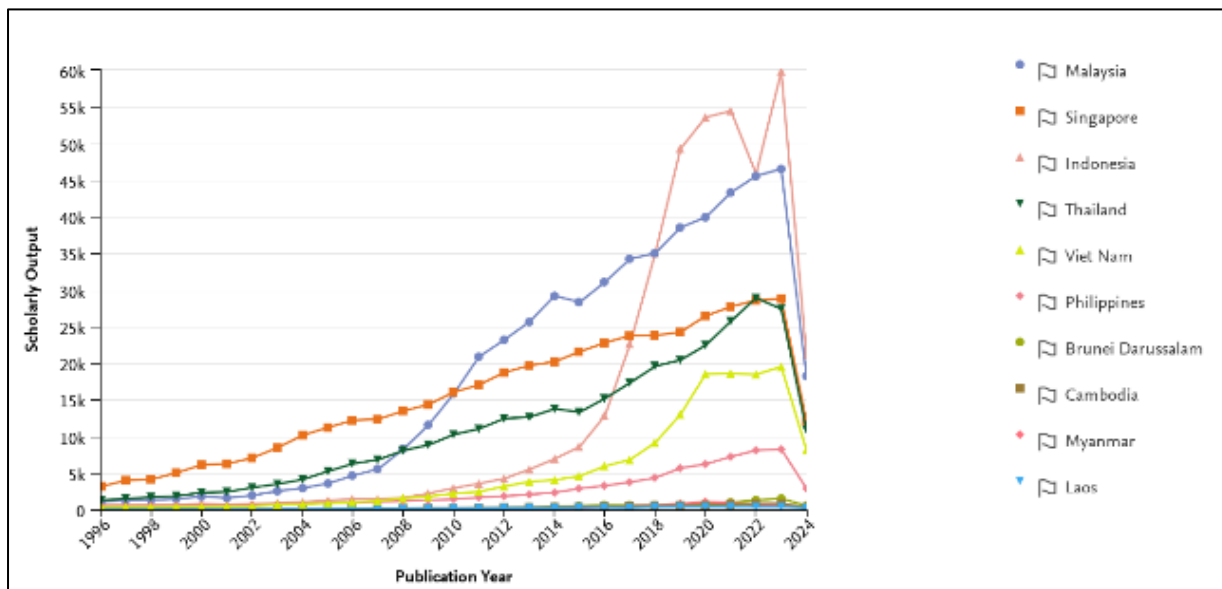


have no access to high-quality journals indexed predominantly in Scopus and Web of Science (San Juan, 2023; Wa-Mbaleka, 2015). In addition, there is an issue with the disparity between the expectations of the labor market and the capabilities of graduates (Macatangay, 2023). Quinto (2022) proposes enhancing the mentoring program to assist graduate students in publishing their research. Nevertheless, faculty members themselves face several problems. From the faculty perspective, Filipino researchers face several challenges, including limited time for research, a lack of research training, concerns about rejection, difficulties in writing in English, and issues with funding and institutional support (Tudy, 2023; Wa-Mbaleka, 2015).

Research productivity among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries indicates that Indonesia has the most significant proportion of scientific publication growth. In addition, Singapore has the highest publication citation counts and number of patents, while Malaysia takes the lead in scientific research (Sukoco et al., 2023). According to Guido and Orleans (2020), the Philippines placed 5th in research production in the field of education from 1996 to 2018. Moreover, Khalid et al. (2019) classified the Philippines' internationalization in higher education in the medium group. In this policy brief, the researcher used SciVal data from Scopus since Scopus is used by the two internationally known rankings, Q.S Ranking and Times Higher Education (Elsevier, 2024b, 2024c).

### ASEAN Research Productivity

**Figure 1. Research Production in Scopus Data between 1996 and 2024**



Notes. The data was exported on May 30, 2024. (Elsevier, 2024a).

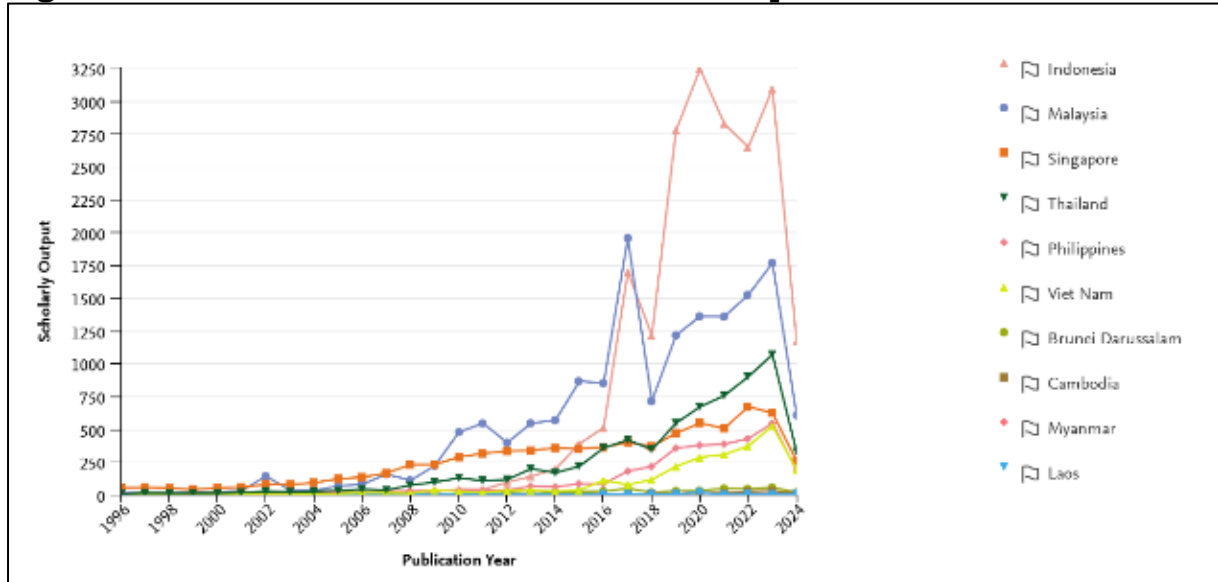
Figure 1 illustrates the trends of the scholarly output in the ASEAN countries across all types of articles and disciplines in SciVal using Scopus data. According to the statistics, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand showed an upward increase between

1996 and 2010. Nevertheless, in 2010, Malaysia surpassed Singapore. In 2013, Indonesia showed a significant improvement; by 2016, it had overtaken Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia regarding the number of published papers. Furthermore,

Vietnam has had a notable rise in the number of publications compared with the Philippines between 2014 and 2020 and has become stable until 2023. However, the Philippines has

seen a slight improvement since 2018, although it still lags behind Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

**Figure 2. Educational Research Production in Scopus Between 1996 and 2024**



Notes. The data was exported on June 4, 2024. (Elsevier B.V, 2024a).

Figure 2 provides insights into the research output of the ASEAN countries in the field of educational research from 1996 to 2024. Between 1996 and 2009, all ASEAN countries had a consistent trend in the number of publications. From 2009 onwards, Malaysia gradually grew in the number of publications. However, in 2018, Indonesia witnessed a significant surge in the number of educational research publications. Similarly, Thailand has seen a consistently increasing trajectory since 2014. Both Vietnam and the Philippines have shown a consistent upward trend in the number of articles published starting in 2018.

This rapid growth can be attributed to the global nature of academia, where publication is a critical factor in many international rankings (Demeter et al., 2022). Universities began focusing on publishing indexed in Scopus due to the two well-known international league tables, the Q.S. Ranking and Times Higher Education,

which utilized Scopus data to calculate points for research for the world ranking (Szluka et al., 2023). Furthermore, the CMO no. 15 series 2019 may have played a role in this increasing pattern (CHED Memo No. 15, 2019).

### The Trade-Off Debates

According to Amani et al.'s (2022) study in Tanzania, students pursued graduate school primarily for job prospects, greater pay, career advancement, personal improvement, and self-fulfillment. Furthermore, the study focused on the reasons for students' delayed completion of their chosen postgraduate program, with one of these factors being poor entrance qualification, which might be linked to institutional issues. In the United Kingdom, university staff emphasized the importance of student readiness for a positive postgraduate student experience (Macleod et al., 2019). Zhu et al. (2022) argued that the caliber of graduate students plays

a crucial role in determining the overall high quality of graduate education.

Another important consideration for the university is the development of a strong research culture. Studies indicate that research productivity is closely linked to the development of a strong research culture, which in turn affects the recruitment of talented individuals and the quality of postgraduate education (Stanko et al., 2022). Quimbo and Sulabo (2014) found that research production is predicted by incentives, perks, and education levels. However, access to research databases such as Scopus and Web of Science is critical for producing high-quality research despite the unrepresented non-English speaking countries in knowledge production (Tennant, 2020).

Aside from access to academic resources, research collaboration has been shown to correlate positively with research productivity (Contandriopoulos et al., 2018). Sayyed (2024) observed that international research collaboration may be a predictor of scholarly output production in hard disciplines. Ocampo et al. (2022) academic discipline, research collaboration, and funding allocation have influenced research production. Furthermore, a research collaboration between the student and teacher helps students enhance their independent research skills. On the other hand, teachers anticipate positive outcomes from students who seek their research experience, assistance, creativity, and critical comments for improvements (Abbas et al., 2020).

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

This policy brief explores the educational research productivity in the Philippines using the lens of the international perspective and offers

recommendations to strengthen Philippine internationalization in higher education. The discussion is centralized into three sections: before, during, and after.

### **1. Before: Enforcing Rigorous Assessments based on the Institutional Admission Process Criteria**

Throughout the Philippines, graduate teacher education admission varies depending on the institution. For example, the National Center for Teacher Education, the Philippine Normal University, requires all incoming postgraduate students to have at least 85% grades, a recommendation letter, and an examination (PNU Website, n.d.). However, some prospective students who have enrolled in the program are uncertain about the direction of their educational research. In some countries, prospective students must provide a personal statement and research proposal to their potential supervisor, participate in face-to-face interviews, and demonstrate relevant work experience (Mirhosseini et al., 2023). It is recommended that robustness assessments be done to identify students' preparedness for a research-oriented degree program.

### **2. During: Implementing and Monitoring Research Practices**

To establish a strong research culture, the CHED Memo No. 15 (2019) became instrumental in establishing research practices in the university. According to Guido and Orleans (2020), graduate students contribute to university research. Nevertheless, it necessitates engaging in activities and organizing seminars, fora, workshops, etc., such as cultivating reading or writing communities (Khoo, 2023). Furthermore, this intervention is not limited to the Global South countries. In Australia, universities see the importance of writing groups,



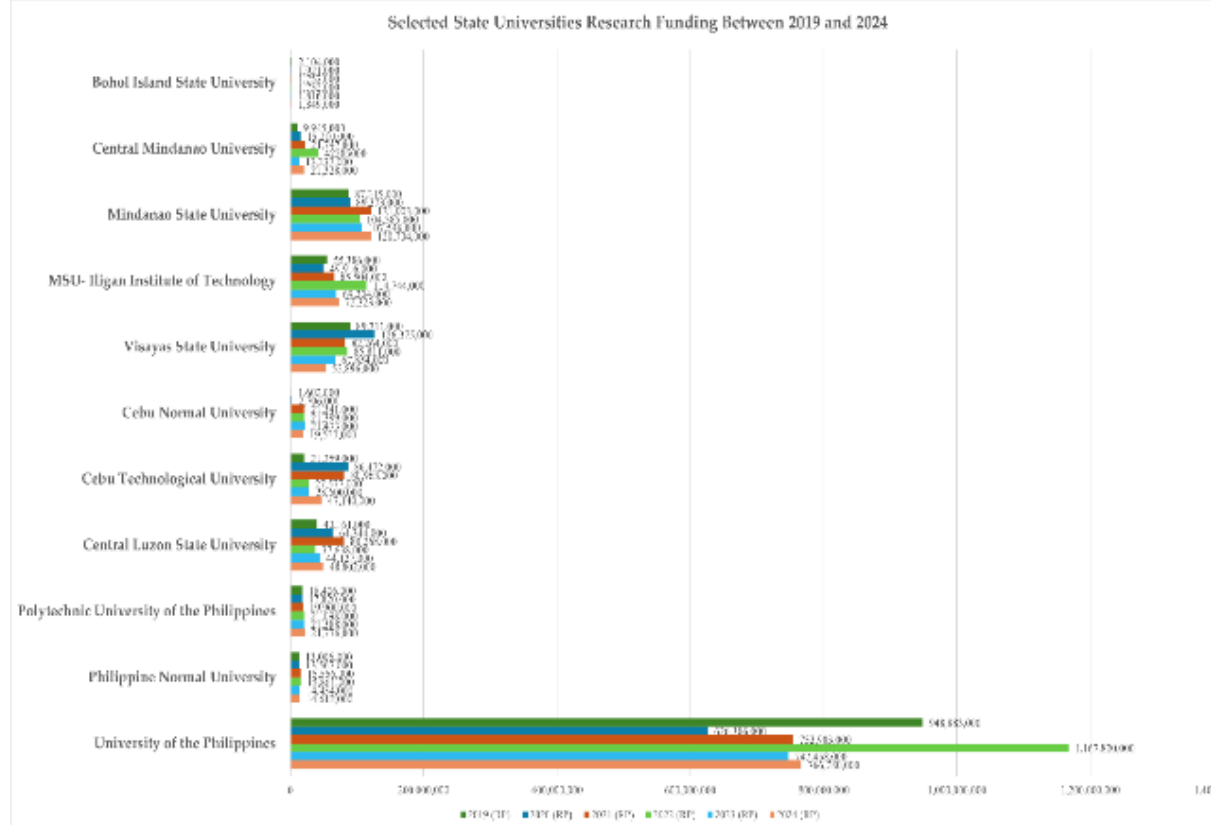
mentorship, and courses related to writing to help their researcher increase their research production, improve the research quality, and increase their knowledge and skills in doing research (McGrail et al., 2006).

**3. During: Strengthening Institutional Resources: Infrastructure, Funding, & Networks**

In their study, Demeter et al. (2022) suggested that the various elements that make up the 'faculties' domain in

the research productivity model, such as the academic environment, infrastructure, funding, and networks, play a crucial role in supporting the growth and productivity of talented individuals for research production. Regarding infrastructure, the universities must have access to academic databases. Networks represent graduate students' capacity to develop connections in the academic world, such as attending conferences, which is one of the effective methods for establishing networks.

**Figure 3. Selected State Universities Research Funding Between 2019 and 2024**



Source: (Department of Budget and Management, 2024)

\*R.P. means Research Program.

In most cases, university graduate students are not funded to conduct research. Figure 3 displays the research program allocations of the selected state universities from 2019 to 2024. The University of the Philippines, Mindanao State University, MSU-Iligan Institute of

Technology, Central Luzon State University, and Visayas State University were the five state universities that received the most budget allocation for their research programs. Unfortunately, rather than increasing the allocation of funds annually, the research budget for 2024

is less in comparison to prior years. Another way of enhancing internationalization is by recruiting adjunct or visiting professors, which aids universities in improving their institutional development and visibility (Henningsson & Geschwind, 2019; Vorkapic, 2016). Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the Philippine government allocate more funds to support internationalization financing, particularly the subscription to top-notch journals or academic databases (i.e., Scopus and Web of Science), and provide students with access to research funds for their research projects or participation in academic conferences.

#### **4. During: Engaged Pedagogy for Research Collaboration Between Student and Teacher**

One of the problems for some Filipino academics is the "laziness" of doing research (Wa-Mbaleka, 2015). Moreover, in a study by Ulla et al. (2021), doctoral academics play multiple roles besides being teachers and researchers. To address these challenges, professors supervising graduate students should implement engaged pedagogy to support students in their research endeavors. As bell hooks (1994) asserts, "Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive (p.23)." Thus, professors must foster a collaborative research environment through engaged pedagogy. Engaged pedagogy was popularized by bell hooks to encourage students and teachers to transgress towards learning (hooks, 1994). Helping students publish their work in a high-quality journal, despite the Philippines's socioeconomic situation, is a way of teaching graduate students to transgress. Quinto (2022) has been vocal about providing a mentorship

program for the students paired with the supervisors or teachers. In addition, Adeyemo (2019) also encouraged Philippine academics to promote research collaboration at national, regional, and international levels. Tudy (2023) noted that publishing high-quality journals needs time, patience, and guidance. It is crucial to have a strong mentorship program to support graduate students.

#### **5. After: Evaluation of the Published Research**

The CHED Memo No. 15 (2019) requires students to publish research not only for the internationalization agenda but also for realizing the Sustainable development goals (U.N., 2015) and the Ambisyon Natin 2040. Despite some scholars argue that it is impossible to "view sustainability" in higher education (Corcoran & Wals, 2004), it is recommended that each university or the Philippine Commission on Higher Education create an evaluation platform for all graduate students' research papers, including faculty researchers and government researchers matching on the Sustainable development goals or the Ambisyon Natin 2040. By doing so, policymakers acquire knowledge and formulate a policy that is grounded in research discoveries or evidence-based. See the example from Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD, 2024).

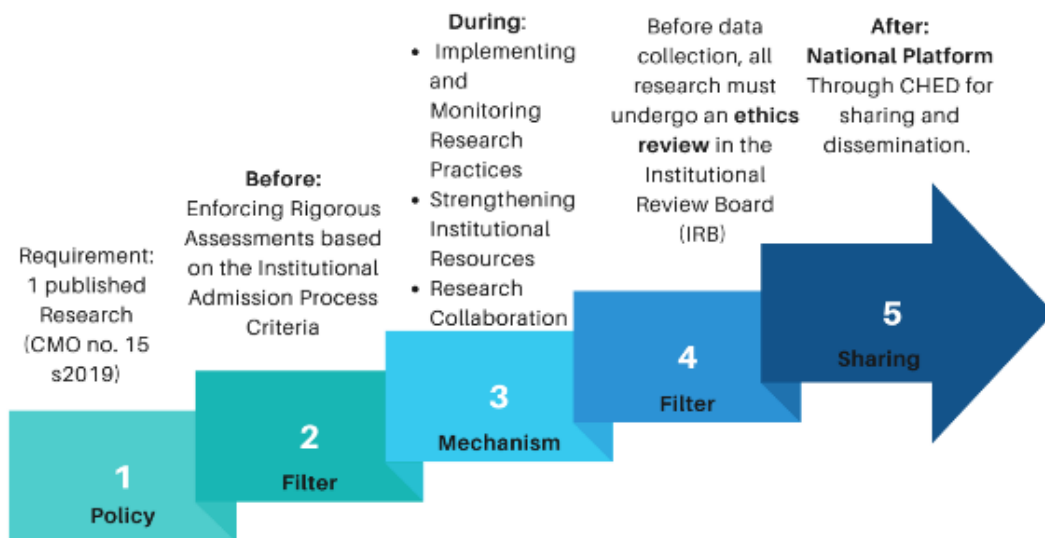
In addition, the Philippines may also build a database like Preprint, a new academic publishing model, to monitor all research progress that ensures quality and avoids future retraction. Some journals allow authors to upload to a preprint website with an assigned Digital Object Identifier (DOI). In addition, this new model allows everyone to see the paper to avoid duplication and can help improve it until it is published. In addition, the platform or database I



suggested allows the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to evaluate the article to avoid future retraction. The Retraction Watch database tracked the number of publications retracted across multiple academic publishers (Retraction Database, 2024). Malaysia recorded 663 retractions, significantly higher than ASEAN countries. Singapore follows with 213 retractions. Thailand (182 retractions), Indonesia (177 retractions), and Viet Nam (111 retractions) have comparable numbers

of retractions with less than 200. Fortunately, the Philippines has a modest retraction rate, with 69 retractions lower than its ASEAN member countries. Cambodia has the fewest retractions, with six; Myanmar has eight; Brunei Darussalam has seven; and Lao PDR has two. Therefore, to prevent the increasing number of retracted articles, it is essential to assess each published research through an evaluation platform while strictly adhering to ethical compliance.

**Figure 4. Framework For Quality Educational Research Production**



Note: The author made this figure via Canva.

According to a study by Guido and Orleans (2020), the Philippines is projected to exceed Singapore's research productivity by 2021. However, according to the data presented in Figure 2, the prediction was not met. Nonetheless, the Philippines ranked fifth in educational research production but sixth across all fields. The implementation of CMO 15 s. 2019 of the "Publish, or No Degree" policy and the compliance with CMO No. 53, 2007, students must finish their master's degree within five years and nine years for

doctoral students while navigating the requirement of research publication (Castulo et al., 2024). The framework (Figure 4) ensures the quality of educational research production and enhances the quality of Philippine graduate education. Filters, mechanisms, and sharing are necessary indicators for high-quality, ethical, and safe research across all disciplines, particularly in educational research. Adeyemo (2019) observed that the Philippines's demographic and economic status is detrimental to internationalization and to ASEAN



regionalization. Adeyemo (2023) emphasized that the process of internationalization, as influenced by global ranking, plays a crucial role in addressing inequality and enhancing global policies and governance.

## CONCLUSIONS

Talent cultivation is fundamental to building the Philippines' research and development to be at par globally. While there is no way to escape this burgeoning system under neoliberalism, the only solution is to exercise caution with the rules they have made in the internationalization of higher education. Moreover, the poor quality of graduate education, as described by the Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM) (2024), can be attributed to the lack of necessary support system mechanisms provided by the Philippine government for Filipino graduate students.

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