



Leadership Practices and Research Capability Development: A Qualitative Study of Faculty Experiences in Internationalizing Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between top management leadership skills and faculty research capability as drivers of institutional internationalization efforts among State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Region XI. The research examined the leadership skills of SUC administrators, assessed faculty research capabilities, explored the extent of institutional internationalization initiatives, and determined how management leadership supports these efforts. Employing a phenomenological approach within Creswell's qualitative research framework, the study utilized in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with 17 academic professionals to capture their lived experiences. Participants shared perspectives on leadership practices among SUC administrators, faculty research development, and internationalization initiatives within their institutions. Findings revealed that top management leadership skills and faculty research capability significantly impact institutional internationalization efforts among SUCs in Region XI. The study contributes to understanding how academic leadership and research capacity development serve as catalysts for enhancing the international profile of regional higher education institutions.

Keyword: Educational Leadership, Internationalization Status, Faculty Research Capability, Top Management Leadership Skills, Descriptive, Correlation, Multi-regression analysis, Philippines.

Purpose Statement

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine how top management leadership skills and faculty research capability influence institutional internationalization efforts among State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Davao Region. Through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, this research captures participants' lived experiences regarding effective leadership practices among administrators and faculty research engagement. The study aims to understand how these elements collectively contribute to successful internationalization initiatives within regional higher education institutions. By documenting and analyzing these experiences, this research seeks to identify critical factors that enhance the international profile and competitiveness of SUCs in Davao Region.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In an era of rapid globalization, internationalization has emerged as a pivotal force reshaping higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide. This transformative process intersects with cultural, economic, political, and social dimensions, compelling institutions to adapt and evolve in response to an increasingly interconnected global landscape. For State Universities and

Colleges (SUCs) in the Philippines, particularly those in the Davao Region, this imperative for internationalization presents both significant challenges and opportunities.

The Commission on Higher Education (CHED), through Republic Act 7722, has mandated higher education institutions to pursue societal transformation and global competitiveness. This mandate emphasizes research productivity as a crucial component of institutional development and international recognition. Research capability among faculty members has become a critical determinant of an institution's capacity to participate meaningfully in the global academic community and contribute to knowledge creation and innovation.

Despite these policy directives, Philippine higher education continues to face significant hurdles in its internationalization journey. These challenges include limited international linkages with foreign universities and industries, insufficient research experience among faculty members (particularly younger academics), inadequate funding, and structural barriers within institutions. Consequently, many SUCs struggle to establish robust research cultures that could propel them toward international recognition and competitiveness.

Leadership within these institutions plays a decisive role in navigating these challenges. As Norshidah Nordin's (2012) research at Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia demonstrates, effective implementation of organizational change requires specific leadership behaviors, organizational commitment, and strategies for managing emotional responses to change. Similarly, studies by Christensen and Eyring (2011) and Selingo (2013) highlight how institutional leadership must adapt to evolving competitive pressures while realigning revenue strategies with institutional priorities.

This qualitative phenomenological study examines the intricate relationships between top management leadership skills, faculty research capability, and institutional internationalization efforts among SUCs in the Davao Region. By exploring the lived experiences of academic professionals through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, this research seeks to understand how leadership practices influence research productivity and, consequently, internationalization initiatives. The findings aim to contribute valuable insights into developing more effective strategies for enhancing the international profile and competitiveness of regional higher education institutions in the Philippines.

Conceptual Framework

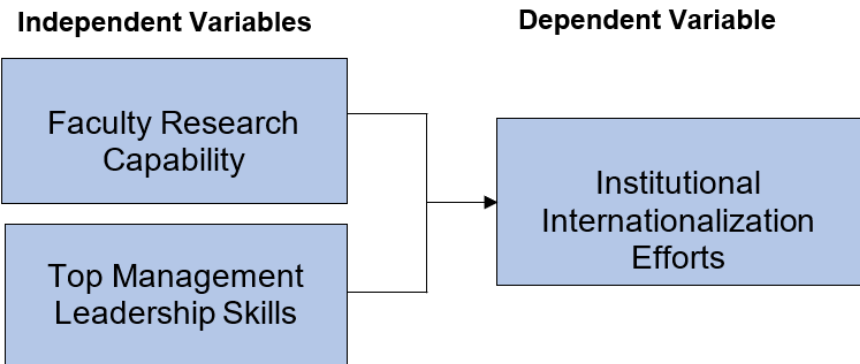


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study aimed to determine the institutional internationalization efforts through the top management leadership skills and faculty research capability in the State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Davao Region. In particular, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants as they engage in a research for institutional internationalization efforts?
2. What are the experiences of teachers on the leadership of their heads among the factors that contributed institutional internationalization efforts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a comprehensive review of literature and research related to the key variables of this study: institutional internationalization efforts, leadership skills, and faculty research capability.

Leadership Skills

Over recent decades, a significant paradigm shift has occurred from management-focused to leadership-centered approaches in organizational governance. While leadership carries diverse meanings across different contexts and individuals, it is widely understood as a dynamic relationship between an individual and members of a group within a specific environment. Weathersby (1999) conceptualizes leadership as focused on creating a common vision, motivating meaningful contributions toward that vision, and encouraging alignment between individual and organizational interests through persuasion rather than command. This perspective frames leadership as a process encompassing leader behavior, follower behavior, and situational environmental factors.

Administrative or Technical Skills

Administrative skills relate to an individual's specific area of expertise and professional competence. As articulated in Robert Katz's seminal work "Skills of an Effective Administrator" (1955), these skills imply "an understanding of, and proficiency in, a specific kind of activity, particularly one involving methods, processes, or techniques." Technical skills are relatively easy to identify when observing administrators performing their specialized functions. They encompass specialized knowledge, analytical ability within a particular discipline, and facility with the tools and techniques specific to that field.

Human or Interpersonal Skills

Human skills pertain to an individual's ability to interact effectively with others—capabilities that differentiate successful team members, managers, and leaders from unsuccessful ones. While technical skills primarily concern working with processes or physical objects, human skills focus on working with people. Katz (1955) notes that individuals with highly developed human skills demonstrate awareness of their own attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs about other individuals and groups, and can recognize both the usefulness and limitations of these perspectives.

Conceptual Skills

Conceptual skills involve the ability to perceive the organization holistically. According to Katz (1955), these skills include "recognizing how the various functions of the organization depend on one another, and how changes in any one part affect all the others." Conceptual skills extend to visualizing relationships between the individual business and broader contexts—industry, community, and national political, social, and economic forces. An administrator with strong conceptual skills can recognize significant elements in any situation and act in ways that advance the overall welfare of the entire organization.

Faculty Research Capability

Research capability among faculty members encompasses multiple dimensions essential for producing quality academic research.

Computational Skills

De la Cruz (2016) emphasizes that computational skills reflect researchers' competence in utilizing statistical tools, packages, or software for data analysis. This suggests that researchers should pursue appropriate training and professional development opportunities to enhance their statistical capabilities, which are fundamental to rigorous research methodologies.

Conceptual Skills

In the research domain, conceptual skills involve the ability to identify instructional problems, determine study boundaries, formulate specific findings, define research titles, articulate research sub-problems, draw appropriate conclusions, and develop testable hypotheses. De la Cruz (2016) argues that researchers must continually conduct research to strengthen these conceptual abilities, which form the intellectual foundation of scholarly inquiry.

Technical Skills

Technical research skills encompass practical competencies such as computer usage for documentation, adherence to formatting guidelines and mechanics in academic writing, proper citation of literature, bibliography compilation, and appropriate data handling. De la Cruz (2016) identifies these capabilities as essential for faculty research development.

Research Culture Development

Developing robust research cultures within institutions requires strategic approaches. Huenneke et al. (2017) identify several strategies aligned with standard models, including cluster hiring, revision of institutional policies and infrastructure, and systematic prioritization of research for both administrators and individual faculty members. Brix et al. (2013) demonstrate the advantages of developing research in cluster areas for emerging research universities.

The University of Puerto Rico provides an illustrative case where developmental funding successfully triggered changes promoting research in an undergraduate minority-serving institution (Godreau et al., 2015). Huenneke et al. (2017) further note that building research capacity in emerging research institutions requires assessment of research management practices and identification of transitional approaches to promote evolving research agendas.

Bosch and Taylor (2011) describe the developmental trajectory of research capability, noting that early phases are characterized by "hand-holding management," institutional emphasis on teaching, faculty perceptions of research as intimidating, and centralized research missions focused on teaching output and research activity rather than quality and outcomes. The transition through broadening and honing phases is marked by increased emphasis on research relative to teaching, decentralization of research missions into college and departmental priorities, increased collaborations, and growing focus on recruiting high-quality researchers and postgraduate students.

Institutional Internationalization Efforts

Internationalization of higher education represents a strategic institutional response to globalization. Knight and de Wit (1997) define it as "the process of integrating an international or intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the institution." This definition conceptualizes internationalization as both a process and a response to globalization, encompassing international and local elements. Altbach (2006) distinguishes internationalization from globalization, describing it as involving "specific policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems, institutions, and even individual departments to deal with globalization."

Components and Activities

Harman (2004) identifies several generic activities associated with internationalization: international movement of students and staff between countries; internationalization of higher education curricula; international links for research and open learning programs; and bilateral, regional, and international recognition of higher education qualifications.

Research on the readiness for internationalization of higher education systems in Southern Philippines reveals that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) demonstrate readiness in terms of mission, goals, and planning. Dimasindel and Salam (2018) found that internationalization policies were articulated as part of basic institutional policies with concrete implementation strategies reflected in strategic plans.

Benefits and Challenges

Internationalization of HEIs offers multiple benefits, including cultural and social impacts on local, regional, and national communities; new perspectives through student and staff mobility; opportunities for knowledge acquisition and international career advancement; and mechanisms for quality assurance conforming to international standards (Bordean & Borza, 2013).

Despite these benefits, significant challenges persist. Dimasindel and Salam (2018) identify insufficient financial support as a perennial problem, noting that internationalization programs are often not prioritized in institutional budgets. Their research indicates infrequent budget meetings and financial targeting, suggesting that funding for internationalization is not adequately secured, potentially compromising institutional readiness.

Internationalization has emerged as a subject of significant interest among academic institutions, policymakers, and administrators due to its impact on economic performance

through cross-border flows of knowledge, knowledge workers, and students (OECD, 2008; Pama, 2013). This growing attention reflects recognition that internationalization represents not merely an academic ideal but a strategic imperative in an increasingly globalized higher education landscape.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative design to explore the complex relationships between top management leadership skills, faculty research capability, and institutional internationalization efforts among State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Davao Region. The qualitative approach was deliberately selected for its capacity to elicit rich narratives from participants' lived experiences, providing insight into nuanced aspects of leadership and research development that might not be captured through quantitative methods.

Phenomenological Approach

Among the diverse traditions within qualitative research, this study specifically adopted a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, as Creswell (1998) articulates, represents a foundational tradition in qualitative inquiry that examines humans' lived experiences with particular phenomena. This approach is distinguished by its focus on describing in detail the thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that constitute participants' authentic experiences.

The purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to distill individual experiences with a phenomenon into universal terms or contexts that illuminate its essential nature. According to Creswell and Clark (2011), this methodology enables researchers to engage with reality from deeper and more varied angles—viewing, listening to, and understanding situations through the perspectives of those who have directly experienced them.

Rationale for Methodological Choice

The phenomenological approach was particularly appropriate for this study because it allowed for exploration of how academic professionals personally experience leadership dynamics, research development processes, and internationalization initiatives within their institutional contexts. Rather than imposing predetermined frameworks or hypotheses, this approach honored the subjective meanings that participants attributed to their experiences, revealing the complex interplay between leadership practices, research capability development, and international engagement.

By focusing on lived experiences, the study captured not only what participants experienced regarding leadership and research in their institutions, but also how they experienced these phenomena—the emotional, cognitive, and professional dimensions that shaped their perceptions and responses. This dual focus on the "what" and "how" of experience, as Creswell (1998) notes, is fundamental to phenomenological investigation. The phenomenological design facilitated deep exploration of participants' perceptions of leadership efficacy, research engagement processes, and internationalization efforts. Through this methodological lens, the study aimed to identify patterns and essential themes that transcended individual experiences, potentially revealing critical insights about how leadership and research capability intersect to advance internationalization within regional higher education institutions.

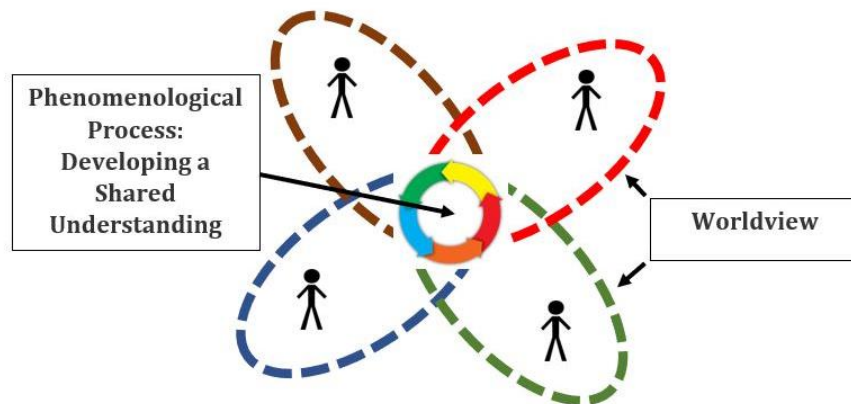


Figure of Process Procedure

RESULTS

The Lived Experiences of Participants as they Engage in Research for Institutional Internationalization Efforts

The study employed both in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather rich data about lived experiences related to institutional internationalization efforts among faculty members from five State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Region XI. A total of 17 participants voluntarily consented to participate in the research: 10 engaged in individual in-depth interviews, while the remaining seven participated in focus group discussions. Table 1 presents a comprehensive profile of the study participants, using pseudonyms to protect confidentiality while documenting relevant demographic information including age range, gender, professional designation, and institutional affiliation. This purposeful sampling approach ensured representation across different roles and institutions while maintaining focus on individuals with direct experience of the internationalization phenomena under investigation. The combination of individual interviews and group discussions allowed for both deep personal narratives and dynamic interactive perspectives on leadership, research capability, and internationalization efforts within these regional higher education institutions.

Table 1: Profile of the Participants of the Study

No.	Pseudonyms of Participants	Age Range	Gender	Designation	Location
1	Jack	30-39	M	IDI	Davao
2	Owen	30-39	M	IDI	Davao
3	Moly	40-49	F	IDI	Davao
4	Andrei	40-49	F	IDI	Davao
5	Fe	20-29	F	IDI	Davao
6	Sammy	30-39	M	IDI	Davao
7	Jake	20-29	M	IDI	Davao
8	Josh	30-39	M	IDI	Davao
9	Dane	30-39	F	IDI	Davao
10	Andy	30-39	M	IDI	Davao
11	Ellen	30-39	F	FGD	Davao
12	Chloe	20-29	F	FGD	Davao
13	Allyssa	40-49	F	FGD	Davao
14	Dorothy	30-39	F	FGD	Davao

15	Elbert	30-39	M	FGD	Davao
16	Sam	40-49	M	FGD	Davao
17	Ashley	20-29	F	FGD	Davao

Analysis of data from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed three essential themes addressing the fourth research question regarding factors that influence institutional internationalization efforts. The first theme, *Financial and moral support from top management*, underscores the critical importance of administrative commitment through both tangible resources and motivational leadership. The second theme, *Time management, discipline, and administrative support*, highlights the organizational structures and personal attributes necessary for sustained internationalization initiatives. Finally, *developing professionalism and personal improvement* emphasizes the ongoing professional development and capacity building required for faculty members to effectively engage in international academic activities. These interconnected themes illustrate how multilevel support mechanisms—spanning institutional resources, administrative structures, and individual development opportunities—collectively create an environment conducive to successful internationalization efforts within SUCs in Region XI.

Table 2: Lived Experiences of Participants Pertaining to Institutional Internationalization Efforts

Issues Probed	Core Ideas	Codes/ Categories	Essential Themes	Supporting Theoretical Perspective
Experiences of faculty on their top management in dealing with institutional internationalization efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sending faculty to trainings and workshops • providing reimbursement on incurred expenses when necessary during research activity • providing fund source to engage faculty in the research projects • providing financial support on faculty attendance to national and international conferences on research • inviting expert resource speaker to train faculty how to develop appropriate research skills 	Having full support from the top management	Financial and moral support from the top management	Contingency Approach Theory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • granting request to travel for presentation • considering subject deloading • informing well the faculty on the research projects 	Feeling important in the organization		
Experiences of Faculty in Research engagement towards institutional internationalization efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • involving the Top Management in Research Activity • providing funds for research publication • sourcing out Funds from other agencies • supported by immediate supervisor when engaged in research endeavor 	Experiencing support from the top management	Time management, discipline and support from the administration	Hierarchy of Need Theory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managing time in doing/engaging in research • learning in publishing research articles • beating deadlines for submission of other requirements • managing hectic schedule for classes • improving research paper needs patience 	managing time and keeping self-discipline		

Effects of their experiences as faculty researcher with the top management support towards institutional internationalization efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning more to become a good researcher • Working hard to improve skills in research • Managing time to accommodate all activities • Striving harder to develop self-esteem as a researcher • Working harder to become an expert researcher • Working harder to publish more research articles 	Developing patience and determination	Developing professionalism and personal improvement	Hierarchy of Need Theory
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing self-trust and faith in the team • Securing place as part of the academic community • Improving trust to the management team • Attending to trainings and write shops • Attending to conferences and for a 	Developing self-confidence and sense of purpose		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing to be a respectable and discipline researcher • Becoming more responsible researcher • motivating others to join and do research work 	Achieving fulfillment and source of influence to others		

Financial and Moral Support from the Top Management:

This is one of the throbbing themes that arose from the responses of the participants of this study with the thematic statement *having full support from the top management* as well as *feeling important in the organization*. The informants cited that as a faculty researcher, one should have the traits like *hardworking, discipline, and support from the administration* when one is engaged in research world and should take it as a challenge especially when beating deadliest deadline when submission an output.

When participants were asked about their engagement in research for institutional internationalization efforts:

As of now I have one and after that I am planning for another one and that every year, I will finish at least one. For me, it is supposedly in the highest level because our school is just there to support us ... I believe it can really help a lot to the institution especially in the SUC levelling, and for me also to grow professionally and could also help me in my promotion. (IDI_P3)

As of now I am involved in two research projects but I do research activity occasionally because of hectic schedule. I think also that I considered myself as active in research because of my involvement in the two projects but in the scale of 1-10, I think my rating is still on 5 or 6 because I still need more exposure on research. (IDI_P4)

There were incentives given to the faculty who were able to publish their research papers in the international journal as stated in the school policy as faculty support to those faculty researchers who can publish their paper in local, national, and international forum. (FGD_5)

Time Management, Discipline and Support from the Administration:

On the positive viewpoint, many participants believed that top management support is one of the factors that that could help in realizing optimum institutional performance which can lead

to institutional internationalization status. In fact, some participants shared that institutional internationalization efforts can be attained through research output from capable faculty and strong support from the administration. These are evident from the statements of participants, as follows:

I believe that the administration is very supportive in the internationalization efforts of the institution. They are doing their best to meet the internationalization standard by utilizing all resources just to keep the college in the right track. (IDI_P3)

The administration is very supportive in the internationalization efforts of the institution. They doing their best to meet the international status by providing resources needed by the researchers. So, in my case as researcher, I have to sacrifice some of my routines for my friends. (IDI_P4)

My head is also a doctor and they have also presented their research internationally, so, when it comes to becoming someone to look up to, I will consider them as one of my mentors, they are very supportive. (IDI_P10)

Likewise, another essential theme that was generated from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion of the participants based on the fifth research question is:

- Role of Participants' Experiences on Top Management Leadership Skills and Faculty Research Capability in Shaping their Beliefs, Attitudes, and Commitments

Table 3: Role of Participants' Experiences on Top Management Leadership Skills and Faculty Research Capability in Shaping their Beliefs, Attitudes and Commitments

Issues Probed	Core Ideas	Codes/ Categories	Essential Themes	Supporting Theoretical Perspective
Belief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • due to the mandates in the 4-fold function of faculty in SUC • because of CHED mandates • professional growth • earning points for promotion • commensurate rank and salary • producing knowledge discovery • innovating new technology 	Self-gratification and sense of purpose as faculty	<i>Being purposeful and responsive to one's duties and responsibilities</i>	Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • desire for knowledge and skills in research • motivated by knowledge produced after engaging in research • awareness to points earned for promotion • awareness of rewards and incentives given by school • had the chance to travel abroad • awareness of financial support given by the administration 	Intrinsically and Extrinsically motivated	<i>Becoming motivated to ignite everyone to do research</i>	Motivation Theory
Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to develop technical skills needed in doing research • to increase skills in conceptualizing research topic • to improve interpersonal relationship among the faculty • to encourage others to do research • to have exposure to the new trends in research • publish research 	Enhancing research skills	<i>Becoming more research engaged</i>	Contingency Theory

Table 3 shows the core ideas or concepts and the emerging themes, which are characterized by the experiences of the informants pertaining to the role of participants' experiences in the shaping of their attitude and commitment in working towards institutional internationalization efforts. Three essential themes have emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions with the participants, namely *sense of purpose and responsiveness to one's duties and responsibilities*, *motivation ignites everyone in action*, and *appropriate research skills produce quality output*.

Being Purposeful and Responsive to One's Duties and Responsibilities:

Based on their experiences, their beliefs emphasized the self-gratification and sense of purpose among faculty in the discharge of their performance. It involved responses like mandates, earning points for promotion, and professional growth. Quotes from participants are as follows:

For me, the aspects that prompt me to display a researcher's behavior is the mandate from CHED and as faculty of the college. Because for now, all faculty members are enjoined to engage in research. (IDL_P3)

One aspect is more of knowing and acquiring knowledge based on the research and at the same time you can earn points for promotion. (IDL_P4)

Having that researcher's behavior will allow one to develop personally and professionally. (IDI_P5)

In that particular, the researcher must possess an attitude that could represent himself as a researcher. (IDI_P7)

Becoming Motivated to Ignite Everyone to do Research:

As faculty in the academe, to become a researcher is a great challenge that requires enough motivation either intrinsically or extrinsically. The experiences from their top management and research endeavors somehow ignite them to be in action which eventually shape their attitudes.

This theme is supported by some of the informants' revelations:

I engage in research maybe because of the environment and the people around you, and for promotion also. (IDI_P6)

One is the personal motivation because of the points earned for promotion, and another thing is personal satisfaction as a faculty in the academe. (IDI_8)

I think the personal motivation because of the points earned for promotion, and another thing is personal satisfaction as a faculty in the academe. Also, research really foster positive attitude because the faculty will be encouraged to engage in research in collaboration and promote positive relationship. (IDI_9)

Support provided in terms of funding and sending the faculty members to trainings, research write shops, and mentoring neophytes in research. (FGD_4)

Becoming More Research – Engaged:

Becoming more research engaged is the key to enhance research skills and producing quality outputs. Ideas such as technical, conceptual and interpersonal are sort of needed qualities in order to make one researcher ready to commit in such endeavor. Thus, participants reveal that:

Since the top management is very supportive, it enables me to perform well, and encourage me to do more research, and perform well in the work place. (IDI_P5)

In my case, the school's endorsement in scholarship application for graduate studies, attending trainings and conferences, really equipping me to become an expert in research. (IDI_9)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the findings and the recommendations made regarding the study.

Conclusions

1. **Faculty research capability** in the five State Universities and Colleges in Region XI was observed to be well-developed and technically supported by their respective management teams.
2. **The extent of institutional internationalization efforts** of the SUCs, as assessed by faculty in Region XI, was found to be highly prioritized and supported by administration.

Consequently, SUC leveling, program accreditation, and quality assurance have become integral components of their institutional monitoring systems.

3. **Both top management leadership skills and faculty research capability** significantly contributed to institutional internationalization efforts in the SUCs of Region XI. The findings indicate that top management leadership skills provided stronger support for these internationalization initiatives.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Expand research engagement opportunities:** Given that top management in Region XI SUCs demonstrates strong support for internationalization efforts, these institutions should develop innovative schemes to encourage more faculty participation in research at local, regional, national, and international levels.
2. **Enhance leadership development:** SUCs should invest in leadership development programs that further strengthen management capabilities in supporting internationalization initiatives.
3. **Future research directions:** Subsequent studies should explore innovative leadership approaches and creative service delivery models to enhance quality services and achieve excellence in research endeavors.

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