

Session 1-3

The Implication of Mutual Recognition in Asia: Case Study of MQA and HEEACT

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Abstract

In recent years, the need for close cooperation of quality assurance agencies and acceptance of review decisions called “Mutual recognition” has been implemented in Asia. Supported by the governments, the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) have just signed a mutual recognition agreement in 2012. It is the first successful MR in Asian nations. The main purpose of the paper is to analyze the process, procedures and success of MR case between MQA and HEEACT.

1. Introduction

Cross-border higher education resulting in the increased mobility of students, academic staff, programs, institutions and professionals has grown considerably in global times. Therefore, how to ensure that the quality of academic programs has met the local and international standards simultaneously has become a great challenge in many nations. In recent years, the need for close cooperation of quality assurance agencies and acceptance of review decisions called “Mutual recognition” has been implemented in many regions. According to David Woodhouse, former President of the INQAAHE, mutual recognition means, “the recognition by two or more external quality agencies is an affirmation by each that it accepts the entire or partial decisions and judgments of the other” (Woodhouse, 2008, p.28). Most importantly, such recognition is simply based on the agencies “having comparable aims and procedures” in the quality of scope and activity, so “they would likely reach the same conclusion in reviewing and passing a judgment on an institution, study program or qualification” (p.28). In this sense, mutual recognition will mainly benefit various higher education stakeholders, including students, institutions, graduates, QA agencies, and employers. For students, MR will primarily provide security for students who study abroad and through exchanges or in Joint programs. Based on the MR, the quality of the programs and institutions are supposed to guarantee that those students will take courses and programs accredited. In terms of institutions, MR is expected to reduce the workloads for them, as it would “render concurrent approval and assessment processes superfluous” (Kristoffersen, 2004, p.4).

The other purpose of mutual recognition is for the quality assurance of quality assurance agencies. Through the process of reaching agreements, quality assurance agencies themselves will inevitably develop a self review mechanism to demonstrate their quality of operations. Quality assurance agencies, to some extent, don't understand each other, which led to the major obstacles of the implementation according to the international networks' experiences. So, many of them began to develop good principles and practices, serving the purpose for quality assurance agency's self-review as well as the preparatory bases of mutual recognition, such as *the Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance* (GGP) by INQAAHE (2009), *the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)* by ENQA (2007), *Chiba Principles* by APQN (2010), and the *Code of Good Practice* by ECA (2004). RIACES also started to develop some guidelines in order to prepare Latin quality assurance agencies to develop internal quality assurance mechanisms (Lemaitre, 2008). These principles and guidelines assist quality agencies to understand the quality of the evaluation process and the meaning of the outcomes including the governance, resources, and transparency of the

external quality assurance agencies, the standards, composition of the panel, and the decisions and collaboration with other agencies (Hou, 2012).

The positive effect of MR on QA agencies is that the knowledge and understanding of the QA procedures and practices will be improved among QA agencies, which will facilitate not only cooperation between QA agencies and higher education institutions, but also cross-border academic activities such as the establishment of the joint programs or branch campus. It is notable that MR will assist graduates who may find that it's a major aid to practicing in other countries and might will enable them to get a job easily in the global job market. Similarly, this affirmation of education graduate quality is also a benefit to employers (Kristoffersen, 2004; Woodhouse, 2008).

Established in 2003, the ECA is the first accrediting agency in Europe aiming to achieve mutual recognition of accreditation decisions among member countries, "in order to facilitate international acceptance of academic institutions, degrees and studies" in the European higher education Area (Frederiks & Heusser, 2005, p.5). The other regions also initiated pilot studies for the implementation of mutual recognition, particularly in Latin America and Asia. Supported by the decision of the 2007 meeting of the Ministers of Education, ARCU-SUR's accreditation schemes under RIACES, have become a foundation for developing mutual recognition in Latin American countries. Encouraged by the ECA experience and RIACES's action, and aiming at coordinating and promoting cooperation of Asian quality assurance agencies, APQN published the Chiba Principles in 2008 as a basis of mutual recognition of Asian quality assurance agencies. In 2010, the World Bank's "Global Initiative on Quality Assurance Capacity" (GIQAC) funds provided to APQN made it possible to initiate discussions on mutual recognition (MR) among selected APQN members (Hou, 2012).

It has been a long time that student mobility between Taiwan and Malaysia kept more and more frequent. According to Taiwan MOE, the majority of Chinese oversea students were from Malaysia in the early 90s. Recently, the number of seeking degree students from Malaysia has been increasing steadily. At present, Taiwan government is encouraging Taiwanese students to study in Malaysia. Both Taiwan and Malaysian governments believe that it is time for both parties to discuss mutual recognition on degree qualification and accreditation outcomes. In 2011, MQA and HEEACT were supported by both governments to conduct MR. Hence, the paper is to analyze the process, procedures and success of MR case between MQA and HEEACT (HEEACT, 2012).

2. MQA and HEEACT

2.1. Malaysia higher education and MQA

The Malaysian education system comprises education from pre-school to university. The education structure can be divided into pre-tertiary and tertiary education levels. The governing authority for pre-tertiary education (pre-school to secondary education) is the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), whilst tertiary or higher education is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (MOHE). There are also several other ministries that oversee pre-tertiary education as well as training and programmes for specific purposes. At the pre-tertiary level, there are five categories of institutions, namely, government and private sector kindergartens, government schools, government-aided schools, private-funded schools and foreign system schools.

As to the tertiary level, there are two categories of HEIs. The first category includes the state-funded public universities which offer bachelor degrees and postgraduate programmes; as well as polytechnics, community colleges and public colleges which offer certificates and diploma level programmes. The latter category is private HEIs which are categorized into private HEIs of university status and non-degree granting colleges and institutions. These private-funded HEIs offer foundation studies, diplomas, graduate and post graduate programmes, as well as 3+0 degrees and other professional qualifications. However, only HEIs with university or university college status can confer their own graduate and post graduate qualifications. Public universities in Malaysia are categorized as research universities, focused universities and comprehensive universities. As for the private HEIs with university status, there are private universities, university colleges and foreign university branch campuses. Private HEIs of non-university status are mainly non-degree granting colleges and institutions. As of December 2010, there are 20 public universities comprising five research universities, four comprehensive universities and 12 focused universities. As for private HEIs, there are 25 private universities, 22 university colleges, five foreign university branch campuses and 403 private colleges. There are also public institutions comprising 28 Malaysian Institutes of Teacher Education, one public college as well as 27 polytechnics and 72 community colleges throughout the country offering various programmes and short courses (MQA & HEEACT, 2012).

Apart from HEIs established under the MOHE in Malaysia, there are other degree and non-degree granting HEIs regulated by other ministries for specific training purposes. Some examples include the National Arts, Culture and Heritage Academy under the Ministry of Information, Communications and Culture, the Malaysian Institute of Teacher Education under the MOE, as well as various skills

training centres under the Ministry of Human Resource (MOHR) and the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Rural and Regional Development .

Malaysian HEIs offer programmes at the certificate, diploma, bachelor's, master's and doctorate levels (at academic and professional fields). The duration of study for non-professional bachelor's degree programmes is between three to four years. For professional programmes, the duration of study is about four to five years. The medium of instruction for bachelor's degree programmes offered at the public universities is Bahasa Melayu, whilst English is used at most private higher education institutions, and for postgraduate studies at public universities. The qualifications awarded by all HEIs are governed by the Malaysian Qualifications Framework.

The MQA is a statutory body under the Ministry of Higher Education and responsible for quality assurance of higher education for both the public and the private sectors following the merger of the National Accreditation Board (LAN) and the Quality Assurance Division, Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (QAD) on 2 November 2007 with the entry into force of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act 2007. The main role of the MQA is to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) which forms the basis for quality assurance of higher education and as the reference point for the criteria and standards for national qualifications. The MQA is also responsible for monitoring and overseeing the quality assurance practices and accreditation of the national higher education. The organization of the MQA consists of three entities: a Council which is headed by a Chairman and 16 members; the Committees which comprise the Accreditation Committees, the Institutional Audit Committee, the Equivalency Committee and the Standards Committees; and the Agency. This structure was established with the objective of ensuring the inter-agencies involvement, impartiality and transparency in the Agency's quality judgments as well as efficiency in its daily operations (MQA, 2012).

2.2. Taiwan Higher Education and HEEACT

The Taiwanese education system comprises education from pre-school to university. Higher education is governed through the Department of Higher Education (DHE) and the Department of Technological and Vocational Education (DTVE) under the MOE. MOE has responsibility for higher education policy making. At the pre-tertiary level, there are several categories of institutions, namely, kindergartens, primary schools, junior high school, and senior high schools. In addition to the regular senior high school, students have the option to attend a three-year vocational high school programme, which can also lead to a bachelor's programme in a more applied way. Taiwan also has four types of technical institutes where each target at a specific age group, namely 5-year junior colleges, 2-year junior colleges, 2-year technical

institutes and 4-year technical institutes. As for higher education, the Taiwanese HEIs consist of comprehensive universities and universities of science and technology. Both types offer a wide range of programmes and they vary significantly in size ranging from the largest with around 30,000 students down to the smallest at around 1,000 students. In general, they range from between 10,000 to 20,000 students. According to MOE, the number of HEIs is 163 which include 112 universities, 36 four-year colleges and 15 two-year junior colleges. HEIs in Taiwan offer a wide range of programmes in academic and professional education. Professional qualifications in Taiwan refer to degree level awards which enable the graduate to practise in professions such as architecture, dentistry, engineering, law, medicine, and others. More recently, many universities have added a range of more applied or vocational programs in fields such as business, management, design, hospitality and tourism. These may also be referred to as professional programs (MQA & HEEACT, 2012).

The universities and the colleges generally require a four-year study period for a bachelor's programme, and it may vary according to the field of study. Professional programmes, for example, dentistry and medicine requires six to seven years of study respectively. In the case of post-graduate programmes, i.e. the master's degree programme students normally requires at least two years whilst doctoral degree programme students will take more than four years to complete. Entrance to university is administered via two methods: Recommendations or Examination. For those that participate in recommendations, they have to take a national academic exam and selecting a list of majors that they are applying to. The first stage is a screening of exam results for eligibility; the second stage would be dependent on the conditions of individual departments selected. For those that did not choose to take the recommendations process or failed their applications, they have the choice to participate in the national university entrance exams after graduation in hopes of university admission.

According to 2005 revised University Act, "The Ministry of Education, in order to promote the development of universities, shall organize an Evaluation Committee, entrust academic organizations or professional evaluators to carry out regular evaluation on the universities and publish the results as reference for educational subsidies from the government and the scale of adjustment and development of universities." The new regulation officially empowers the MOE to establish an independent evaluator, Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan, to ensure the quality of Taiwanese higher education (HEEACT, 2012).

The organization is composed of a Board of Directors, Chairman of the Board, Advisory Committee, President, Office of General Affairs, Office of Evaluation

Affairs, Office of Research and Development, Taiwan Medical Accreditation Council (TMAC), and also Taiwan Nursing Accreditation Council (TNAC) (HEEACT, 2012).

2.3. Starting point

Encouraged by both governments, an MoA between the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) was duly signed on June 2011 to start MR. By signing the MoA, both agencies agreed to cooperate through, amongst others, exchange of information, mutual understanding, exchange of staff and experts, and establishment of a Joint Technical Committee to consider the development of a Statement of Confidence of each other's quality assurance outcomes. It claimed that *“the primary objective of this Statement is to express mutual confidence on each other's accreditation of bachelor degree/higher education qualifications awarded to students in Malaysia and Taiwan by their respective higher educational institutions.”* With the establishment of the Statement of Confidence, it is hoped that this could ease and facilitate the mobility of students between both countries through qualification recognition.

3. Methodology

The methodology of the project involves exchanging and examining the quality assurance documents and processes as well as holding a series of Joint Technical Committee workshops and observation visits to selected higher education institutions (HEIs) in both countries. This is to gain in-depth insights on the quality assurance system implemented in both countries and to identify its substantial differences or commonalities as the basis for confidence and recognition of each other's decision on accredited programmes for non-professional bachelor's qualifications.

Both agencies discussed a framework, which contains 11 criteria to be considered in assessing and determining the comparability of non-professional bachelor's qualifications to support the potential Statement of Confidence of Quality Assurance Outcomes. There are eleven criteria listed as follows:

Table 1: Framework of criteria

Criterion 1	Powers & Responsibilities of the Agency
Qualifications Framework	
Criterion 2	Levels of Qualifications
Criterion 3	Learning Outcomes" Descriptors
Criterion 4	Credit System
Criterion 5	Entry Requirements and Progression Opportunities
Quality Assurance Systems	
Criterion 6	Quality Assurance Approaches and Type of Accreditation
Criterion 7	Quality Assurance Standards

Criterion 8	Peer Reviewers
Criterion 9	Accreditation Evaluation Process
Criterion 10	Results of Accreditation and Audit
Criterion 11	Information on Accredited Qualifications/ Register

Source: **MQA & HEEACT (2012). Report on the comparative study on the quality assurance system in higher education in Taiwan and Malaysia.** Unpublished.

On 8 November 2011, the MQA's Technical Committee led by Prof Zita Mohd Fahmi, Emeritus Prof Dr Gajaraj Dhanarajan and Mr Soo Sit Chuan participated in a workshop conducted by HEEACT in Taiwan, where both agencies presented their quality assurance systems. The HEEACT documents referred to during the workshop were, a translated copy of The Handbook for Accreditation, The Handbook for Institutional Audit, the relevant education laws, and a sample copy of accreditation documents submitted by the Department and Graduate Institute of Finance, National University of Taiwan. On 9-10 November 2011, the MQA's Technical Committee observed an institutional audit visit at the Providence University, Taichung.

To complete the project, the HEEACT's Technical Committee led by Dr. George J.J. Jiang, Dr. Angela Yung-chi Hou, Ms. Sophia Hsiang-ping Ma, Dr. Karen Hui-jung Chen and Ms. Yu Hsin Lin paid an exchange visit to Malaysia on 3-4 April 2012. They attended a workshop conducted at MQA, where both agencies discussed the details of each criterion and determined the strength of its comparability and come up with a Table of Comparison. They also visited two universities; Universiti Malaya and Taylor's University to have better understanding on the practice of internal quality assurance within Malaysian universities. The report of the visit is as per. Generally speaking, MQA and HEEACT adopted 4 stage road map with "understanding, procedures, acceptance, and decision" to achieve MR, like ECA (See Table 2).

Table 2: Schedule for MR agreement

June 2011	signing the MoA Between MQA and HEEACT	Stage one	Understanding
July, 2011	Establishment of Technical Committee		
August, 2011	Development of a Framework for assessing and determining the comparability of higher education systems and QA systems	Stage Two	Procedures
Sept, 2011	Documents exchanges		
Nov, 2011	MQA visited HEEACT / observation of HEEACT institutional accreditation		
April, 2012	HEEACT visited MQA/ visited Universiti Malaya and Taylor's University		
June, 2012	Complete final report	Stage three	Acceptance
July, 2012	Sign MR between MQA and HEEACT		
August-	Malaysian and Taiwan governments	Stage four	Decision

	<p>recognized each other qualification of higher education institutions. Bachelor's degree programs at 157 Taiwan higher education institutions were recognized by Malaysian government. At the same time, bachelor's degree programs at 121 Malaysian higher education institutions were recognized by Taiwan government.</p>		
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Source: by authors

4. Reasons for success and implication for other nations

There are three major reasons for success, including developing friendship and trust, designing a systematic review framework, having strong support from both governments and Malaysian International Students Association.

- (1) Developing friendship and trust is the first step for MR between MQA and HEEACT

Both MQA and HEEACT are the INQAAHE and APQN members since 2007. Both QA networks developed a platform of interaction and understanding among all QA agencies. MQA and HEEACT were required to comply themselves to the principles and guidelines of INQAAHE and APQN when they were applying for membership. Based on the common standards of QA, they have been building up their confidence and trust on each other's QA.

Reliance on trust and confidence, a Memorandum of Arrangement (MoA) between the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), was duly signed on 20 June 2011 at the MQA Office, in Petaling Jaya. The MoA was signed by Dato[™] Dr Syed Ahmad Hussein, the Chief Executive Officer of MQA and Dr George J. Jiang, the President of HEEACT. The signing of the MoA is in accordance with the agreement reached by both parties earlier to establish and strengthen the cooperation between both agencies.

With the establishment of the Statement of Confidence, it is hoped that this could ease and facilitate the mobility of students between both countries. Pursuant to the signing of the MoA, there were two meetings held between MQA and HEEACT representatives as follows:

- a. *Meeting with Dr Angela Hou, Yung Chi, Dean of the Office of Development & Research, HEEACT) at the MQA on July 8, 2011*
- b. *Meeting with Mr. To-Ming Chu, Deputy Director and Cultural Attaché at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Malaysia at the Ministry of Higher Education on September 14, 2011*

Among the matters discussed at both the meetings were the formation of a Joint Technical Committee of both agencies and the MQA's proposal on the project to be carried out by the Joint Technical Committee towards the establishment of the said Statement of Confidence.

(2) A systematic framework was adopted to review each other's higher education and QA systems.

11 criteria were used for both MQA and HEEACT to prepare their country report and to edit a comparison chart in order to compare the differences and similarities among each other. Both agencies mainly inspected their Powers & Responsibilities, Qualification Framework, and **Quality Assurance Systems in their self assessment reports before on site visits (Table 3).**

Table 3: Comparison of Quality Assurance Frameworks

QA Aspects	Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)	Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), Malaysia (formerly LAN in 1997-2007)
Year of establishment	2006	MQA 2007
Established by	The Ministry of Education and 153 Universities and Colleges	Govt. MQA is a statutory body.
Funded by	Ministry of Education	Both (annual grant and fees)
HEIs under its purview	51 public HEIs / 97 private HEIs	20 public HEIs, 42 private universities and university colleges, 400+ private HEIs, 24 poly techniques+ 34 community colleges and other HEIs
Nature of the Process	Mandatory	Voluntary by MQA Act but mandatory by government polices
Major Functions	Institutional accreditation Program accreditation Audit / accountability Performance rankings Research and Development International outreach Self enhancement	Certification Accountability, Self Improvement, Quality Enhancement
Scope	Both private and public Universities.	Both private and public universities and non-universities.
Public Vs Privates	Applies same standards.	Applies same standards.
Unit For QA	Program, and Institution	Institution, faculty, program, themes, aspects. (The Project is limited to the institutional QA approach.)
Self-assessment	Yes	Yes

QA Aspects	Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)	Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), Malaysia (formerly LAN in 1997-2007)
Report (SAR)		
Guidance to prepare SAR	Detailed Guidelines	Detailed Guidelines
Who participates in the preparation of SAR	Management staff, Administrative staff, Teaching staff, Students	Management staff, Administrative staff, Teaching staff, Students, Involvement of others is encouraged
Involvement of international experts	Limited foreign members in institutional review panel, joint development of procedures, meetings, formal information exchange	Limited foreign members in review panel, joint development of procedures, meetings, formal information exchange
Register of Reviewers	Yes	Yes
Reviewer profile	Subject Experts, Experts in general HE, QA Staff, Representatives from industry	Subject experts, experts in general HE, international members, employers/industry representatives, QA staff, Representatives of professional organisations
Identifying Reviewers	Nomination by Universities / University Associations Identified by The Board of Directors of HEEACT	Nominations by the HEIs and government; Identified by agency staff and through advertisements
Who appoints reviewers?	The Board of Directors of HEEACT	Governing Board-the Agency
Role of HEI in review panel composition	HEIs are consulted and can offer their feedbacks on reviewers' draft accreditation reports.	HEIs are consulted. They can record reservation.
Panel size	Institutional: 12-16 (according to the size of the university) Program: 4-6 (according to the department size)	4-6 + Agency QA officer
Policy on Conflict of Interest	Yes	Yes
Use of only trained Reviewers	Yes	Yes

QA Aspects	Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT)	Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), Malaysia (formerly LAN in 1997-2007)
Checks and balances to ensure objectivity of the QA process	1. Use of documented criteria. 2. HEIs' role in panel selection 3. HEIs' comment on the report, HEIs evaluate the panel report; validated by the special committee 4. Meta evaluation	Use of documented criteria. HEIs' role in panel selection, HEIs comment on the report, HEIs evaluate the panel report; validated by the special committee
Dissemination of QA policies	Printed guidelines, website, seminar, refresher courses, circular, on-line journals	Printed guidelines, web site, refresher course, seminar, circulars
Checking complaints Handling of HEIs	Yes. Student feedback on teaching and learning, facilities, welfare etc.	Yes Student feedback on teaching and learning, facilities, welfare etc is considered.
Who is responsible for the report	Onsite Panel Reviewers	Mainly chairman and secretary supported by contributions by panel members
Report conclusions	Comments, suggestions, accreditation status	Commendations, affirmations, recommendations, suggestion for corrective action
Follow-up	Yes.	Yes Depends on the conditions stated in the certificate of accreditation /provisional accreditation
Validity of Outcome	5 years. Varies depending on conditions specified.	In general 5 years. Varies depending on conditions specified.
Appeals	Yes. Post QA reporting depending on conditions imposed.	Yes. Authority – Minister for HE. Process- formal written representation. Outcome- Approved or rejected. Post QA reporting –depends on conditions imposed

Source: HEEACT (2012). Final report on mutual recognition between MQA and HEEACT. Unpublished.

In 2011, the MQA's Technical Committee first participated in a workshop conducted by HEEACT in Taiwan. The MQA's Technical Committee observed an institutional audit visit at the Providence University, Taichung. In turn, the HEEACT's Technical Committee paid an exchange visit to Malaysia in 2012. They attended a workshop conducted at MQA, where both agencies discussed the details of each criterion and determined the strength of its comparability. They also visited two universities; Universiti Malaya and Taylor's University to have better understanding on the practice of internal quality assurance within Malaysian universities.

After onsite visits, both agencies discussed each criteria one by one and developed a rubric for level of comparability, including weak comparable, moderately comparable, and strongly comparable. One of 11 criteria is identified as “moderately comparable” with a number of 10 items in category of “Strongly comparable”. None fell in “weak comparable” (table 4). In order to fill the gap of in “Levels of Qualifications”, HEEACT provided a report on generic learning outcomes outlined by the 81 accredited institutions, which demonstrated that “the emphasis on learning outcomes has been widely accepted by Taiwan universities. The competencies that the students should have after the completion of the programs in Taiwan universities and colleges include professional knowledge, generic skills, and attitude and values. The component modules contribute to the fulfillment of the program’s learning outcomes of Taiwan’s universities and colleges. It is worthwhile noticing that most Taiwan’s institutions still regard “value and attitudes” as the most important core competency that the students should develop in the learning period at a study program”. (HEEACT, 2012, p.8)

Table 4: Table of comparison

No.	Name of Criteria	Decision	Reasons
Criterion 1	Powers & Responsibilities of the Agency	Strongly comparable	There are similarities in most of the responsibilities of both agencies. Some of the functions done by HEEACT, e.g. training for reviewers, publishing book and promoting international collaboration are also done by MQA in its core business but it is not mentioned specifically in the list. While the MQA has legislative power for its functions, HEEACT’s jurisdiction is derived from ministerial directive, i.e. MOE.
Criterion 2	Levels of Qualifications	Moderately comparable	Education systems of both countries are modeled against different system. Taiwan like other countries which are US-based has no qualifications framework. Nevertheless, most of the common elements especially for the bachelor’s level and above under the qualifications framework are in place.
Criterion 3	Learning Outcomes	Strongly comparable	Based on the learning outcome descriptors from both countries for

	“ Descriptor s		the bachelor’s degree, and comparing the taxonomy level, it can be said that the level of complexity is comparable.
Criterion 4	Credit System	Strongly comparable	The credit system of both countries has high similarity. Both countries have a clear and formalized method of calculating credits and is clearly documented.
Criterion 5	Entry Requirements and Progression Opportunities	Strongly comparable	Both countries practise that potential bachelor’s degree graduates who further their studies at master’s level may be accepted to progress directly to doctoral level after being evaluated as having capability to do so.
Criterion 6	Quality Assurance Approaches and Type of Accreditation	Strongly comparable	Both agencies conduct programme accreditation. However, the HEEACT also conducts institutional accreditation while the MQA conducts institutional audit for a variety of purposes including ensuring that the programme continues to maintain the standards and meet the MQF. The validity period of accreditation differs in that HEEACT’s is for five years whereas MQA’s is perpetual but validity is subject to satisfactory maintenance audit outcome.
Criterion 7	Quality Assurance Standards	Strongly comparable	The standards used by both agencies are similar and comparable. The HEEACT has one standard which focuses on the research while the MQA’s evaluation on this aspect is embedded in the Area 6: Education Resources of COPPA.
Criterion 8	Peer Reviewers	Strongly comparable	Both agencies have a database of assessors/ reviewers who are appointed from members of the academia, professional bodies and industry, and experienced in their respective fields.
Criterion 9	Accreditation Evaluation Process	Strongly comparable	The process of evaluation for programme accreditation of both agencies is highly similar except that in Taiwan it is conducted at institutional level involving all programmes offered and massive

			number of assessors.
Criterion 10	Results of Accreditation and Audit	Strongly comparable	Both agencies have a formal independent accreditation committee comprising members who are experienced and qualified in the related discipline. This independent committee will decide on the accreditation status.
Criterion 11	Information on Accredited Qualifications/ Register	Strongly comparable	Information on accredited qualifications of both agencies and the procedures for its inclusion into the public domain (website or register) are transparent and properly documented.

Source: MQA & HEEACT (2012). Report on the comparative study on the quality assurance system in higher education in Taiwan and Malaysia. Unpublished.

(3) Having strong support from both governments and Taiwanese-Malaysian International Students Association

It is clear that mutual recognition requires, indeed, agreement among governments that these principles are relevant. Hence, the external factors including the political and legislative contexts cannot be ignored in MQA and HEEACT case.

Pressured by Taiwanese -Malaysian International Association, both governments aggressively promoted the MR initiative in order to facilitate degree awarded recognition between two countries. According to party President Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek, Malaysia, “On the mutual recognition between the MQA and Taiwan’s HEEACT, we felt this is the most important step towards eventual recognition of Taiwanese degrees” (Malaysian Chinese Association, 2012). Each year there are approximately 800 Malaysian Chinese oversea students studying in Taiwan universities and colleges. Over past decades, Malaysian Taiwanese students’ qualifications were not recognized by Malaysian government, so as that they would not be eligible to take part in national examinations as well as to be employed as governmental officials. Due to no diplomatic relation between two countries, MQA and HEEACT were commissioned by both governments to implemented MR of accreditation outcomes each other, which would lead to the degrees awarded by accredited institutions recognized both governments indirectly.

5. Conclusion

As Asian nations have generally recognized that mutual recognition has brought many benefits, such as a growing student mobility rate of 43% within the region, the MQA and HEEACT case will be learned by other nations. Yet, the role of government remains the most important factor for success of MR. This is important

given that it is usually up to governments, rather than quality assurance agencies, to establish educational relationships between countries (Cameron, 2012, personal communication). HEEACT and MQA's case provides further evidence of the significant role of government in reaching mutual recognition.

International organizations like APQN, and INQAAHE can also play a significant role in the initial stage. Certainly, good practice statements published by the networks provide a good foundation to move toward mutual recognition. Instead of the Chiba principles, the INQAAHE GGPs are used as the point of reference for the self-review of HEEACT and MQA. Undoubtedly, they can be used to strengthen communication between the quality assurance agencies and universities in different countries and also to help capacity-building of the emerging quality assurance agencies.

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