

Profiling occupational therapists' preference for an international master's program in occupational therapy: A needs analysis study

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ABSTRACT

Background: To advance occupational therapy knowledge and practice in Southeast Asia, it is pivotal that quality master's degree programs in occupational therapy are in place. Such a program must respond to the needs of the region in terms of occupational therapy education, practice, and scholarship. By recognizing the diversity of the occupational therapy education and training in the region, it has become possible to consider alternatives in establishing a graduate program in occupational therapy through partnerships and consortia. In order to make an informed decision to decide whether co-creating a master's program in occupational therapy through an international consortium within the region is possible or not, a needs assessment is warranted.

Objectives: To describe the profile of occupational therapists living and working in the Southeast Asian region who would like to pursue a master's degree in occupational therapy via an international consortium.

Materials and methods: An online survey design was used to produce data that would be used to inform the co-creation of an international master's program in occupational therapy. The survey questionnaire was designed specifically for this study and included three sections: 1) information and consent form; 2) demographic information; and 3) information about the need for and preferences on a master's program in occupational therapy. Participants were recruited through professional organizations and various social media platforms of national and international occupational therapy groups.

Results: Eighty-five final-year occupational therapy students and 143 occupational therapists from the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and other countries completed the survey. Majority (62%) of the respondents was interested in pursuing a master's degree in occupational therapy because they perceived that an advanced degree can enable specialization in practice, promote personal and professional development, and help generate new knowledge for the field. The characteristics of the envisaged international master's program must be: 1) completed ideally in 1.5 to 2 years, 2) taken by part-time students who are also working practicing, 3) delivered via a hybrid arrangement (i.e., online and face-to-face) with a fixed weekly schedule, and 4) matriculated for USD 1,000 per semester.

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Conclusion: While this cross-sectional survey cannot encapsulate the totality of occupational therapists' needs in terms of their professional development, the survey provided an empirical basis to inform decisions in the creation of a master's program in occupational therapy jointly offered by an international consortium of Southeast Asian universities.

Introduction

Eleven culturally, economically and politically diverse countries, namely Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Brunei, and Timor-Leste, compose the Southeast Asian region.¹ This diversity along with unique health and educational systems have shaped how entry-level occupational therapy education in Southeast Asia is being offered—either as a diploma course (3 or 4 years) or a bachelor's degree (4 to 5 years). In the aforementioned list, only the first six have an established occupational therapy educational program and, except for Vietnam, have programs recognized by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT). The curricula of these programs share the same educational goal of producing qualified occupational therapists who will eventually serve the health workforce. Diploma programs, however, focus more on the technical skills to provide occupational therapy services, whereas the bachelor's program will offer the acquisition of technical skills with an opportunity to engage in research and months of fieldwork in different fields of occupational therapy practice. In recent years, the WFOT has initiated programs to develop transitory programs from diploma to bachelor's degree in occupational therapy.² Entering the twenty-first century entails the need to reimagine and transform how we teach and learn occupational therapy. Transformative occupational therapy education includes introducing and developing competencies on capacity building, community-based rehabilitation, social entrepreneurship, human rights, disaster preparedness and response, climate change, and global health specific to environmental, social, and economic sustainability.³ In order to transform the curriculum of advanced studies in occupational therapy, it is important to first examine the contexts of potential students.

Global context of occupational therapy education

WFOT's minimum standards for occupational therapy education advocates for contextually relevant occupational therapy educational programs that are sensitive to both local health and social needs and global evolving trends of the profession.⁴ However, knowledge and practice generated by Anglophonic (e.g., USA, Canada, UK, and Australia) and European countries continue to dominate occupational therapy and occupational science discourses.^{4,5} Efforts to *decolonize* occupational therapy and occupational science in the Global South through knowledge generation for and by countries/regions outside the Global North has been progressing, albeit slowly owing to the generally low research output from Southeast Asia, in particular, vis-à-vis other Asian regions like South and East Asia.⁶⁻⁷ In addition, the World Health Organization's Rehabilitation Competency Framework provides a timely and context-specific framework

wherein learning outcomes can be aligned with the workforce and population needs of Southeast Asia.⁸ In the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Qualification Reference Framework or AQRF, a diploma degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree is equivalent to level 5, level 6, and level 7 in terms of knowledge, skills, and competencies.⁹ Postgraduate degree (level 7) programs are important drivers of scholarship of a profession or academic discipline.¹⁰ These postgraduate occupational therapy degree programs exist within the region particularly in Thailand (one university), the Philippines (three universities), and Malaysia (three universities). It is unclear if existing programs are meeting scholarly productivity expectations. There are also countries within the region that still perceive occupational therapy as a technical-vocational endeavor, hence the existence of diploma programs within the ASEAN region. These variations in educational aims and graduate outcomes potentially pose a challenge in creating a clear trajectory for occupational therapists in Southeast Asia to advance their education further. However, the AQRF remains a structuring mechanism to ensure that educational and work qualifications are at par across Southeast Asian nations.¹¹

In some developed countries, a master's degree is now required to become a qualified occupational therapist. In the ASEAN region, having a master's degree in occupational therapy is an optional trajectory for continuing professional education akin to completing short-term certifications and self-directed learning, training and practice. The WFOT stated that post-graduate occupational therapy programs are supposed to equip occupational therapists globally in terms of knowledge, practice, and policy making to advance the profession forward.¹² Specifically, there is a need to create a community of ASEAN scholars focused on generating evidence to strengthen and propel occupational therapy practice in the region. Moreover, the skills of the next-generation of occupational therapy education leaders in Southeast Asia need to be harnessed.¹³ However, it is also important to consider that the motivation to do advanced education in occupational therapy differs from person to person. Ideally, taking a master's degree is the actuation of the pursuit to lifelong learning, while for the more pragmatic occupational therapists, it can be a stepping stone to work as an occupational therapist overseas or expand professional roles.^{14,15}

Strategic use of partnership/consortium for graduate programs in occupational therapy

Offering a graduate program in any field is a challenging feat. Aside from creating a curriculum, there is a need to identify qualified educators, procure funding and resources, prepare a space for teaching and research, and recruit competent students among others. These preparations can take years before actually offering and running the

graduate program. To facilitate the development of some master's programs, creating a consortium is strategic. The European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy or "Euromasters in occupational therapy" is an example of such a consortium. Unlike a partnership of two universities, a consortium brings together three or more universities that share resources (faculty, funding, goals, research, and students among others). The Euromasters in occupational therapy is facilitated by five universities from five countries within Europe: Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. In this consortium, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences is the host school holding the administrative seat of the Euromasters in occupational therapy. Every semester, students take a module in one of the countries belonging to the consortium until they complete the whole program. Each module offers a different subject-from advanced occupational therapy courses, research courses, to the master's thesis. Facilitated by educators from across the five universities, modules are offered in a blended teaching and learning arrangement with the goal of advancing the research competencies of students in the field of occupational therapy and occupational science.

Through international partnership (as in a consortium) institutions are able to share academic resources, ease logistical and bureaucratic challenges, facilitate educational advancement, and promote internationalization.¹⁶ For instance, the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) in Switzerland used to only offer a diploma course in occupational therapy. By joining the Euromasters in occupational therapy consortium, while not without challenges, the ZHAW was able to upgrade their occupational therapy program to a bachelor's degree level. Similarly, the use of both the on-site and on-line arrangements for teaching and learning have become advantageous since the students are usually studying part-time while staying employed or tending a family. Underpinned by adult learning (*andragogy*) and self-determined learning (*heutagogy*), a blended teaching-learning arrangement allows learners to study what they need and want, learn at their own pace, and set their own learning goals that go beyond the mandated curriculum. While not always enticing to more conservative learners, the blended teaching-learning arrangement can allow adult learners to assume the role of a student and a worker at the same time, learn from home, and keep budget to essential expenses. More importantly, educational technology has made global resources more available than ever to students without having to fly to another country and spend a lot of money. While the "human touch" and interactivity are valuable in higher education, the increased use of videoconferencing applications and learning management systems in universities has significantly reduced the cost of learning without sacrificing the quality of education.

Although most graduate programs are offered by one academic institution for consistency and tradition, more universities globally are reconsidering the potentialities of creating partnerships and consortia not only for its practical implications but also to engender internationalization,

collaborative learning, transformative education, and creative economies.¹⁷ The reforms being employed in higher education in terms of technology, logistics, curriculum, and pedagogy have made graduate programs more accessible and available to more diverse groups of learners especially in occupational therapy. Such a feat has been initiated between African and European universities for a post-graduate program in health policy and systems research and analysis and among Latin American countries on a postgraduate program on human rights.^{18,19}

With the hope of advancing occupational therapy knowledge and practice in the ASEAN region, it is pivotal that quality master's degree programs in occupational therapy are in place. Such a program must be facilitated by globally qualified occupational therapy educators and proposed to respond intentionally to the needs of the region in terms of occupational therapy education, practice, and scholarship. By recognizing the diversity of the occupational therapy education and training in the ASEAN region, including learner purpose and motivation in doing advanced learning, it has become possible to consider alternatives in establishing a graduate program in occupational therapy through partnerships and consortia. In order to make an informed decision to decide whether co-creating a master's program in occupational therapy through an international consortium within the ASEAN region is possible or not, a needs analysis was warranted. While a needs assessment for a master's program in occupational therapy has been conducted locally, an empirical study with a focus on gathering data on the need for a postgraduate program in occupational therapy within the ASEAN context has not yet been conducted in the past.²⁰

While a needs assessment for a master's program in occupational therapy has been performed in the Philippines and Indonesia, an empirical study with a focus on gathering data on the need for a postgraduate program in occupational therapy within the ASEAN context has not yet been conducted.^{20,21} In order to make an informed decision on whether co-creating a master's program in occupational therapy through an international consortium within the ASEAN region is possible or not, a needs analysis is warranted. A needs analysis is a basis for developing a curriculum based on potential learners' profile.²²

To this end, the current study aimed to determine if there is a market of students interested in pursuing a master's degree in occupational therapy. Specifically, this needs analysis study collected data to: 1) identify the demographics of prospective students for the master's program, 2) describe their interests and motivations, and 3) identify the specific learner preferences that will help shape the co-creation of the master's program.

Materials and methods

This study utilized a survey research design that yielded quantitative data sets analyzed using descriptive statistical analyses.

Participants

Respondents were recruited through electronic posters

shared via social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Researchers approached different local occupational therapy associations and occupational therapy groups to facilitate dissemination within and outside ASEAN regions (e.g., Philippine Academy of Occupational Therapy, Occupational Therapy Association of Thailand, Indonesian Occupational Therapy Association, Asia-Pacific Occupational Therapy Regional Group, World Federation of Occupational Therapists). Respondents included the following: 1) final year students in an entry-level occupational therapy program and 2) graduates of an entry-level occupational therapy program. As an online survey, all respondents provided their informed consent electronically via Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) e-consent framework prior to participation. Failure to electronically sign the consent form signifies withdrawal from the study.

Target sample size was 192. This was based on probability sampling formula for survey research.²³ We estimated the population size based on WFOT's Human Resource Project statistics, which reported 9,721 practicing occupational therapists and 745 graduating students per year from Southeast Asian countries with available data (i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand).²⁴ The number of graduating students served as an estimate for the number of final-year occupational therapy students in the region with established occupational therapy entry-level programs. We adopted a 7% margin of error and the most conservative estimate of 50% for the survey response distribution.²³ Two-tailed level of significance was set at ≤ 0.05 .

Survey tool

An online survey questionnaire was designed specifically for this study and consisted of three parts. The survey extracted some information from a needs assessment study that sought to inform a local master's program in occupational therapy.²⁰ First is the information and consent form, which contains all the necessary information for the participants to make an informed consent. The second part gathered demographic data to address the first objective. The third part gathered information related to interests and motivation (second objective) and preferences for a master's program in occupational therapy (third objective) in relation to schedule, mode of delivery, and cost.

For the survey implementation in the Philippines, the questionnaire was in English (i.e., no Filipino translation was envisioned) considering that the language of instruction in all BS Occupational Therapy programs in the Philippines is English. Partners from Thailand (AK) and Indonesia (ES) translated the questionnaire into Thai and Bahasa Indonesian, respectively following the World Health Organization's translation guidelines including forward translation, expert panel back-translation, pretesting and cognitive interviewing, and drafting of the final version. The survey was hosted in REDCap.^{25,26}

Procedure

Prior to running the survey, the draft survey questionnaire was piloted to thirty individuals (ten for each language option) who belong to the population of interest. The purpose of this pilot was to get an idea of how long it takes to complete

the survey and to ask for feedback regarding the comprehensibility of the questions. After final revisions based on the pilot survey, the anonymous online survey was disseminated to the public and was made available for a period of three months. It took participants 15-20 minutes to complete the online survey. All collected data were organized and stored in a password-protected Excel file and only accessible to the researchers.

Data analysis

Survey results were summarized using descriptive statistics, mostly count frequencies and percentages. Distribution of participant's age was positively skewed and was, thus, described using median and interquartile range.

Ethical approval

Study protocol has been reviewed and approved by the institutional ethics board of the University of the Philippines Manila (UPMREB 2022-0127-EX), Chiang Mai University (Thailand; AMSEC-65EM-007), and Surakarta Health Polytechnic (Indonesia; LB.02.02/1.1/693.7/2021).

Results

The respondents who completed the survey were 85 final-year occupational therapy students and 143 occupational therapists who were residing in the Philippines (48.2%), Indonesia (29.8%), Thailand (17.5%) and other countries (4.4%). Table 1 presents the demographic data of the survey respondents.

A majority of the respondents (62.3%) were interested in pursuing a master's degree in occupational therapy while some (22.8%) were unsure about their future plans at the time of the survey. Their most prevalent motivations for considering an advanced degree were to: 1) enable specialization in specific practice areas; 2) facilitate personal and professional growth; 3) expand body of knowledge in occupational therapy and occupational science; 4) upgrade clinical knowledge and skills; and 5) boost opportunity for work promotion (Table 1).

Table 1 Respondent characteristics (N=228).

	Final year students	Graduates
N	85	143
Median age, years	22.0 (21.0-22.0)	26.0 (24.0-28.0)
Sex, F/M	70/15	107/36
Country of residence, N		
Philippines	44	66
Indonesia	40	28
Thailand	1	39
Others [†]	0	10

[†]Australia, Bangladesh, India, New Zealand, Qatar, Taiwan, USA, South Korea

Among those who were either interested in or were unsure about pursuing a master's degree in occupational therapy, 72.2% were willing to enroll in a master's program in occupational therapy offered by a consortium of Southeast Asian universities. A program duration that is 1.5 to 2 years long was preferred by 89.2% of the respondents. Moreover, 72.3% wanted a part-time job over a full-time study schedule. Respondents were more divided in their class schedule preference, with 46.6% and 42.4% being partial towards a fixed weekly schedule throughout the semester and block schedule (i.e., 6-8 hours of daily classes for 1 week, 2-3 times a semester), respectively. A majority wanted a hybrid course delivery (i.e., blend of online and face-to-face instruction; 81.1%) and a learning option involving a combination of student- and teacher-directed learning (90.1%). As for financial cost, 86.4% selected 1,000 USD as a reasonable tuition fee per semester.

A small number of respondents (14.9%) indicated no interest in a master's degree in occupational therapy. The most common reasons given for the lack of interest were: 1) currently attending an advanced degree program or already attained an advanced degree; 2) preferred to pursue a different field of study; and 3) financial constraints. Responses to the needs assessment questionnaire are presented in Table 2.

In summary, the survey respondents mainly came from the three member countries of the envisioned consortium: Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. Majority of those surveyed were interested in pursuing a master's program in occupational therapy. Based on the needs analysis, the preferred master's program should be: 1) completed ideally in 1.5 to 2 years, 2) taken by part-time students who are also working occupational therapy practitioners, 3) given through a hybrid arrangement (i.e., online and face-to-face) with a fixed weekly schedule, and 4) matriculated for USD 1000 per semester.

Table 2 Frequency count (and percentages) of respondent's responses to survey questions.

	Students	Graduates
N	85	143
Interest in pursuing a master's degree		
Yes	62 (72.9)	80 (55.9)
No	3 (3.5)	31 (21.7)
Unsure	20 (23.5)	32 (22.4)
Top motivation for pursuing a master's degree*†		
Boost opportunity for work promotion	28 (34.1)	33 (29.5)
Enable specialization in specific practice areas	48 (58.5)	53 (47.3)
Expand body of knowledge in occupational therapy and occupational science	36 (43.9)	43 (38.4)
Facilitate personal and professional growth	36 (43.9)	55 (49.1)
Improve and expand clinical practice	29 (35.4)	21 (18.8)
Improve occupational therapy education	9 (11.0)	22 (19.6)
Meet requirements for international licensure	19 (23.2)	17 (15.2)
Upgrade clinical knowledge and skills	27 (32.9)	36 (32.1)
Upgrade leadership capabilities	1 (1.2)	4 (3.6)
Upgrade research knowledge and skills	4 (4.9)	18 (16.1)
Upgrade teaching knowledge and skills	3 (3.7)	6 (5.4)
Interest in a master's program offered by a consortium of Southeast Asian universities†		
Yes	63 (76.8)	77 (68.8)
No	1 (1.2)	2 (1.8)
Unsure	18 (22.0)	33 (29.5)
Study schedule preference†		
Part-time	59 (72.0)	80 (71.4)
Full-time	23 (28.0)	32 (28.6)
Program duration†		
1 year	6 (7.3)	7 (6.3)
1.5 years	36 (43.9)	40 (35.7)
2 years	38 (46.3)	62 (55.4)
>2 years	2 (2.4)	3 (2.7)

Table 2 Frequency count (and percentages) of respondent's responses to survey questions. (continues)

	Students	Graduates
Learning option[†]		
Student-directed	2 (2.4)	4 (3.6)
Teacher-directed	9 (11.0)	4 (3.6)
Combination	71 (86.6)	104 (92.9)
Method of delivery[†]		
Fully face-to-face	10 (12.2)	13 (11.6)
Fully remote/online	5 (6.1)	8 (7.1)
Blended (more face-to-face)	53 (64.6)	52 (46.4)
Blended (more online)	14 (17.1)	39 (34.8)
Class schedule preference[†]		
Fixed weekly schedule throughout semester	41 (50.0)	49 (43.8)
Block class schedule	33 (40.2)	51 (45.5)
No preference	8 (9.8)	12 (10.7)
Willingness to attend courses from multiple international higher education institutions[†]		
Yes	61 (74.4)	92 (82.1)
No	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)
Uncertain	21 (25.6)	18 (16.1)
Research track master degree[†]		
Yes	26 (31.7)	58 (51.8)
No	13 (15.9)	20 (17.9)
Uncertain	43 (52.4)	34 (30.4)
Willingness to have foreign experts as thesis adviser[†]		
Yes	59 (72.0)	98 (87.5)
No	3 (3.7)	1 (0.9)
Uncertain	20 (24.4)	13 (11.26)
Tuition fee[†]		
1,000 USD/semester	73 (89.0)	94 (83.9)
1,500 USD/semester	9 (11.0)	16 (14.3)
2,000 USD/semester	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)

* Respondents were permitted to choose up three options in the list

† Respondents who had no interest in pursuing a master's degree did provide answers for this item

Discussion

This study aimed to obtain a demographic profile and learner preferences of a potential pool of students to inform the co-creation of an ASEAN master's degree program in occupational therapy. Two groups participated in the survey: final year students (at the time of data collection) and occupational therapy practitioners.

Demographic profile

The age and sex profile of this study's respondents

are mostly young adults and female. This profile is similar to other studies of students enrolled in or have graduated from entry level graduate programs (e.g. OTD) in the United States.^{27,28} Although the age of this study's cohort is younger than that of the studies of Banning *et al.* and Dalomba *et al.*, collectively, it is in the young adult stage that occupational therapists consider pursuing a graduate degree.^{27,28} Graduate school may be viewed to be a venue to configure career directions. The majority of our cohort being female builds on

previous literature that occupational therapy is a female-dominated profession.²⁴⁻²⁹

Interests and motivations in pursuing advanced degrees

A study by Amani *et al.* revealed five motivations of why individuals pursue postgraduate studies: employment prospects, better salary, career progression or change, personal development, and prestige or self-actualization.³⁰ Pursuing a postgraduate degree is a challenging feat in itself and if not supported, students could drop out midway due to an incomplete thesis, insufficient achievement motivation, lacking learning strategies available, and low confidence.³¹ Career opportunities appear to be a primary source of interest and motivation to pursue graduate degrees. For this study, these were expressed as practice specialization and opportunity for promotion. This finding is consistent with the study of Dos Santos who explored the motivations and career decisions of Asia-Pacific students enrolled in occupational therapy programs in Australia.³² Dos Santos reported favorable career opportunities as motivation for enrolling in OT in Australia although the educational level of Dos Santos' participants was not stated explicitly. The participants of this study also expressed desire to contribute to the knowledge base of occupational therapy and occupational science. This reflects this group's positive attitude towards research, scholarship, and evidence-based practice. This was further expressed by their willingness to have foreign experts for thesis supervision.³²

Program preferences (length of program, schedule, course delivery, tuition)

Pragmatic and course delivery factors come into play in making decisions related to graduate program enrollment. The preference for USD 1000 per semester tuition fees, hybrid learning, a fixed weekly schedule, and interest in a Southeast Asian consortium program were favored by the majority. These preferences are similar to the decision making factors that the participants in Dos Santos' study expressed.³² These factors indicate that quality of the graduate program and reasonable tuition fees may account for the decision to pursue graduate programs. These factors may be used by university administrators in marketing graduate programs.

Technology has enabled universities to offer blended and fully online programs. The participants' preference for a blended learning environment indicates that the generation of potential enrollees for graduate programs view blended learning as a convenience, freedom and flexibility, and continued productivity in their workplaces as reported by Banning *et al.*²⁷ Banning *et al.* compared graduates of entry-level doctor of occupational therapy programs of on-campus and hybrid environments. The authors found that both groups were similar in preparedness for examinations and the workforce, skill level and sense of belonging, professional and leadership roles assumed after graduation.²⁷ Banning *et al.* participants expressed that while hybrid programs honed skills such as independence, autonomy, and self-discipline, the learning style of the student must be a good fit with the learning environment.²⁷ Other points to be explored include students' study approach, self-efficacy, and mental health.²⁸ These may be considerations in student recruitment

and admissions of the proposed ASEAN occupational therapy master's. Bower *et al.* argued that in-person classes for hybrid programs need to be carefully planned as attendance may be challenging.³³ This is an important aspect to consider particularly after two years of online education as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies conducted among health professions educators revealed that certain aspects of health professions education cannot be replaced by online sessions. These include clinical skills and direct feedback on clinical procedures; and interactive learning with peers.^{34,35} The findings may affirm the preference of our study participants for blended with more face-to-face components.

Another consideration is the type of master's program based on the study of Serrata-Malitano and colleagues where they classified master's program into professional master's and academic master's.³⁶ The professional master's is characterized as a pre-registration program that enables its graduates to practice the occupational therapy profession, whereas an academic master's entails a thesis requiring students to undergo proposal presentation, ethical clearance, the research process, and a thesis defense.³⁶ The envisaged master's program to be developed from this study is an academic master's program, hence expecting prospective students to be practicing occupational therapists who would like to advance their competencies in occupational therapy and willing to conduct supervised research.

Changing paradigms are transforming higher education. Successful evaluation of pedagogical initiatives requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond just measuring students' cognitive skills. It is vital for programs to assess the relationship between teaching strategies and advancements in culturally sensitive healthcare, covering everything from therapeutic relationships and systemic processes to structural impacts.³⁷ Future occupational therapy programs should address educational paradigms, ethics, learning outcomes, cultural respect, and opportunities for study. It is essential to prioritize talent, integrate diversity into the curriculum, and cultivate metacognitive abilities in higher education graduates who are not only ready for work but also for continuous learning.

Study limitations

Generalization of this study's findings must be done with caution as our participants were predominantly graduates from the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. Final year students of entry-level occupational therapy programs had low response rates, in general. This might be because of the online nature of the survey and limited means to follow up on students to complete the survey. We also did not explore the perspectives of potential educators, administrators, and staff, especially of potential challenges of a consortium offering advanced degrees. Also, no examination of political, economic dimensions and health needs from the Southeast Asian region that occupational therapists can contribute to were included. In the future, it is valuable that we solicit consultation with stakeholders towards determining the postgraduate topics and disciplinary areas that will shape the curriculum as well as identifying prospective faculty members who will lead, manage, and promote the program.

Implications

The creation of a master's program in the ASEAN region will contribute to a global understanding of ASEAN occupational therapy education, training, practice, and research galvanizing a stronger ASEAN cultural identity. There are still many countries in the ASEAN region that require occupational therapists to be part of the workforce to address population needs other than rehabilitation needs.^{38,39} It is important that occupational therapy education is grounded on the realities of the context to help address these service needs including public health and community services.³⁹ In addition, research and programs of research are limited in lower middle income countries in which most ASEAN countries are classified under.⁴⁰ This needs analysis study provides empirical data ascertaining that there is indeed a market for a master's degree in occupational therapy from an international consortium. Specifically, our findings provide us salient information to frame the envisaged academic master's program in occupational therapy entailing a two-year duration, hybrid arrangement, underpinned by adult learning pedagogical principles, and costs USD 1000. Moving forward, it is important that the sustainability of the program and partnership will have to be addressed by the involved institutions.⁴¹ Iloft and colleagues highlighted lessons from the experience of the European Master of Science program in occupational therapy that can be adopted by the ASEAN consortium.⁴² These include soliciting support from professional and academic networks such as the ASEAN University Network, aligning the program with the ASEAN higher education policy framework (e.g., ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework), developing a joint decision making and accountability relationship, and underpinning the program on internationalization.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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