

Stakeholders' Assessment On Offering Master Of Engineering Programs In Romblon State University: Feasibility Study

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Abstract— The study focused on the participants' profile and their assessment on the feasibility of offering Master of Engineering programs with specialization in Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering in Romblon State University. Strengths and weaknesses on viability as regards management, market demand, financial and operational aspects of the proposed program were evaluated. Using descriptive research, validated survey instrument was used to gather data from 103 participants. Results were validated in Focused Group Discussion among various stakeholders as discussants. Descriptive statistics were used to describe participants' profile, and assess viability of the proposed programs. Most participants were married males, 29 years old and below. Almost all were graduates of engineering course; licensed engineers, some were civil service eligible; majority has intent to enroll Master of Engineering. Stakeholders found that offering the proposed programs supports the university's vision and mission which considered specializations on Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering, Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. The strengths of the programs were in terms of very high viability in terms of management, market demand of graduates, financial and operational aspects. Based on the study, offering of Master of Engineering with any of the four specializations is feasible.

Index Terms—Assessment, Feasibility Study, Master of Engineering programs, SWOT analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

As the pressing demands of change become more intense, programs offered in higher education institutions need thorough assessment not only in terms of relevance but also viability. According to [1], feasibility analysis is the foundation upon which any project plan resides. Providing competent human resource in the Philippines and beyond remains the mandate of state universities and colleges of in the country. Given the manpower demands from the industries and budgetary resources of universities, rationalization of program offerings become a crucial management concern. In addition, [2] emphasized that as budgets become increasingly strained with every passing year, higher education institutions are turning to market research firms to investigate the viability of their current and potential academic programs. Many institutions require feasibility research as part of the program approval process and for good reason. Also, the Commission of Higher Education requires

feasibility study on proposed program offering. Also [3] claimed that the basic premise of a feasibility study is to determine the potential for success of a proposed business venture. Considering academic programs, [4] asserted that the world needs to offer educational programs that will prove to be beneficial for the society.

According to [5] with the inevitable challenges posited externally like amalgamation, ASEAN 2015, climate change among others, the University is pressed to renew the time-honored core values and commitment to persistently strive for a "cut above" relevant learning inputs to clientele across disciplines. The commitment resonates the mandate of the University in producing professional leaders in advanced education, sciences and technology, information technology, agriculture, fisheries and forestry through applicable programs and instructions and sustaining accreditation processes across campuses. It also includes menu in providing fair and affordable access to higher learning and new ideas based on the needs and prevailing demands in the global market.

To pursue program quality, CHED issued specific Memo for each engineering program (CMO 34 S. 2007 for BSABE, CMO 29 S. 2007 for BSCE, CMO 34 S. 2008 for BSEE and CMO 9 S. 2008 for BSME) with the end view of keeping apace with the demands of global competitiveness. The engineering programs are designed to produce graduates who possess knowledge and skills in the application of engineering principles for various areas identified by the program.

In the case of the Romblon State University (RSU), the above claim on quality programs was spelled out through program accreditation by the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities (or AACUP) in which all engineering programs of the College of Engineering and Technology (CET) were granted Level III re-accredited status. The school continuously submits for evaluation its systems, processes of implementations and outcomes, the results of which become inputs for enhancement framework.

Based on institutional mandate, "Romblon State University is committed to provide advance education, higher technological, professional instruction and training in agriculture and fishery, forestry, science and technology, education, arts and other relevant fields of study. It shall undertake research & extension services, and provide progressive leadership in its areas of specialization" (RA No.9721, Sec.2, 2009), the College of Engineering and Technology thus, proposes to offer the Master of Engineering Program in support of the intuitional philosophy of the school in accordance with its Charter, RA 9721, upholding the humanistic philosophy of education particularly on enhancing the individual's potentialities to the optimum.

Since 1990, the college had produced engineers in the field of Agricultural Engineering, and in the fields of Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering in 2001. Results of tracer study by [6] and [7] indicated that the employment rate of graduates of these program were 84.6%, 88.6%, 100%, and 91.2% respectively which means that the program outcomes are highly needed in the community.

With this scenario, the initiative of offering Master of Engineering (MEng) with specialization in the four engineering programs offered in the university will provide engineering graduates opportunities for Continuous Education Program (CEP) and will make

them more attractive in the field of employment. The general objective of Master of Engineering is to develop further the students in the application of engineering theories and principles as they engage themselves in various business opportunities and challenges in the industry in the local community and elsewhere. It offers advanced research and management cases that may enhance students' skills apart from their technical expertise. It is so designed to integrate the theories with project-based researches and actual modeling programs along with outcomes-based curriculum.

The beneficiaries of the program will be prepared for further study towards a doctoral program which may be offered sooner or later in the college.

Objectives of the Study

The study has the following specific objectives were:

1. To determine the profile of the participants in terms of:
 - 1.1) Personal characteristics;
 - 1.2) Undergraduate course;
 - 1.3) Eligibility;
 - 1.4) Agency Affiliation;
 - 1.5) Position in current job; and
 - 1.5) Intention to enroll Master of Engineering
2. To determine the strengths and weaknesses of offering Master of Engineering programs in the Romblon State University in terms of:
 - 2.1) Management viability;
 - 2.2) Market viability;
 - 2.3) Financial viability and
 - 2.4) Operational aspects.
3. To assess whether or not offering Master of Engineering at Romblon State University is feasible.

Theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

The conduct of this study is supported by the Human Capital theory of Johann (1993) which provides that formed education is highly instrumental to the improvement of the productive capacity of the population. It assumes also that the most efficient path to human resource development is through education. The contention is, the more education is gained by persons, the more competent they are, therefore the more productive they become.

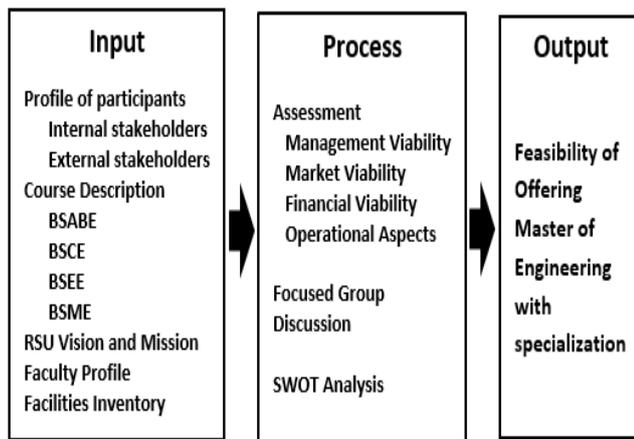


Figure 1. The Conceptual Framework of the study

Feasibility study according to [8] can be referred to in many facets including market viability, technical viability, management model and business model viability, exist strategy viability and economic and financial model viability. These are all the factors considered when deeming something viable.

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) of the study follows the input, process, output (IPO) model. The input includes the characteristics profile of internal and external stakeholders, proposed MEng programs, RSU mission and mission statements, CET faculty profile, and school facilities; while the processes consists of participants' assessment on program viability in terms of management, market, financial and operational aspects, focused group discussion and SWOT Analysis. The output is feasibility of offering Master of Engineering in the university.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was employed to obtain facts and present the current data on strengths and weaknesses of Romblon State University to offer Master of Engineering [9]. Survey and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) were both employed to attain the

objectives of the study. Survey questionnaire was used to gather the data. It has two parts, one for participants' profile and another for assessment on viability of Master of Engineering Program in the Romblon State University in terms of management, market, financial and operational aspects. The final draft of the questionnaire was presented to experts for validation and refinement. Permit to administer the instrument was sought from heads of agencies representing the target participants.

Participants were 30 employees of the RSU to represent internal assessment and 73 employees from other agencies to represent external assessment. Graduates of engineering course were considered most in either group of participants. FGD was conducted to validate data and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as regards offering of Master of Engineering. Representatives from various educational sectors of the community were invited to compose the panel of discussants.

Relevant documents were examined to attain the objectives of the study. Among others, these were documents pertinent to RSU mission and goals, CET tracer studies,

Table 1. Profile of the participants in terms of personal characteristics

A. Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	69	67
Female	34	33
Total	103	100
B. Age	Frequency	Percentage
50 and above	30	29.1
40-49	12	11.7
30 - 39	28	27.2
29 and below	33	32.0
Total	103	100
C. Civil Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	33	32
Married	68	66
Others	2	1.9
Total	103	100

academic programs, and faculty profile of the university. Descriptive statistics like frequency, average and percentage were used to describe participants' profile and mean average to assess viability of the proposed program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

On Participants' Personal Characteristics

Data (Table1) showed that majority (67%) of the participants are males and only 33% are females; 32% of them are 29 years old and below, 27.2% are in age bracket 30-39, some 11.7% in age bracket 40-49 whereas 29.1% are 50 years old and above. Considering civil status, 66% are married, 32% are single and some other being 1.9%.

On Participants' Course and Eligibility

Regarding the course taken by the participants, (Table 2) BSCE has most number which is 39.8 %, followed

by BSagEn, BSEE and BSME with 21.4%, 12.6% and 7.8 % respectively. Some others constitute 18.4% in the distribution. For the eligibility acquired, 58.2% has engineering licensure eligibility, 31.1% are civil service eligible while some 10.7% are for other eligibilities. According to [10], a professional engineering license is considered an honorable achievement, and some professional engineers are unlicensed. This means that they did not complete the steps to become certified, which include two exams, a four-year degree and four years of experience. While some are able to obtain work without a license, doing so is very difficult.

Table 2. Profile of the participants in terms of course and eligibility acquired

A. Course	Frequency	Percentage
BSAgEn	22	21.4
BSCE	41	39.8
BSEE	13	12.6
BSME	8	7.8
Others	19	18.4
Total	103	100
B. Eligibility	Frequency	Percentage
Engineering License	60	58.2
Civil Service	32	31.1
Others	11	10.7
Total	103	100

Table 3. Agency affiliations and positions of the participants

A. Agency affiliations	Frequency	Percentage
Government	92	89.3
Non-government	11	10.7
Total	103	100
B. Positions	Frequency	Percentage
Top managers	3	2.9
Middle managers	17	16.5
Rank and file	83	80.6
Total	103	100

Table 4. Participants' intention to enroll Master of Engineering

Intent to enroll	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	63	61.1
No	38	36.9
Undecided	2	2.0
Total	103	100

On Agency Affiliation and Current Position of Participants

Findings (Table 3) showed that 89.3% were affiliated with government agencies while 10.7% were with non-government agencies; most were occupying rank and file positions, although 2.9% were in top although 2.9% were in top Management positions and 16.5% were middle managers. As claimed by [11] job position is significant determinants to employees' organizational commitment.

On participants' intention to enroll Master of Engineering

Data (Table 4) reflected that among the 103 participants, 61.1% has intention to enroll Master of Engineering, some 36.9% has no intention to enroll; while 2% were undecided during the conduct of the study. This clearly showed that most participants have intent to enroll in the proposed engineering programs.

On Description of the course

In the presentation of the description of the proposed program with the four specializations during the focus group discussion, CET dean spelled out that the undergraduate programs of the various specializations of proposed M.Eng had produced several graduates

since the offering, most of whom were gainfully employed in the local community and abroad. Some were pursuing postgraduate program in some universities outside the province. In addition the researcher informed the discussants about tracer studies conducted.

The conduct of Tracer Study of Graduates of Engineering Programs of CET [6] showed that since 1990, the college had produced engineers in the field of Agricultural Engineering, and in the fields of Civil Engineering, Electrical Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering in 2001. Findings indicated that the employment rate of graduates of these programs were 84.6%, 88.6%, 100%, and 91.2% respectively which means that the program outcomes are highly needed in the community. With the information, the DEPED supervisor suggested to offer the program in his pronouncements when he said (unedited);

“It is very timely to offer the course so that most of our graduates can continue their dreams of taking Master’s degree which will be very useful in landing a job especially in other agencies where MS graduates are the priority. Start now, do it now. If you will not pursue this, when will it be? As the Dean, do the actual and not only by talking. Discover the reality in offering this program and also include Sanitary Engineering as an additional program”

The panel subscribed to the supervisor’s statements. Basically this means that graduate programs must be made available and accessible to all the students since it is found relevant.

Institutional Mandate

The operation of Romblon State University is based on its institutional philosophy quoted as:

“The University as a state institution shall administer its affairs in accordance with its Charter, RA 9721 and with the general laws of the country in so far as they are applicable. The University upholds the humanistic philosophy of education. It is therefore committed to: a) Enhance the individual’s potentialities to the optimum; b) Promote physical, intellectual, social, emotional and spiritual well-being of the youth; c) Recognize the learner as the center of pedagogical efforts; and d) Transform the educated individual to become a man for others.”

Regarding the above mentioned framework, the school envisioned “Romblon State University as a premier Institution of higher education in the MIMAROPA Region for a globally competitive Province of Romblon”.

In support of the vision and goals of the university, the academic institution is mandated to hold on the mission statement as quoted:

“Romblon State University is committed to provide advance education, higher technological, professional instruction and training in agriculture and fishery, forestry, science and technology, education, arts and other relevant fields of study. It shall undertake research & extension services, and provide progressive leadership in its areas of specialization” (RA No.9721, Sec.2, 2009).

The university president reiterated that the inevitable challenges posited externally like amalgamation, ASEAN 2015, climate change among others; pressed to renew the time-honored core values and commitment to persistently strive for a “cut above” relevant learning inputs to clientele across disciplines. The commitment resonates the mandate of the University in producing professional leaders in advanced education, sciences and technology, information technology, agriculture, fisheries and forestry through applicable programs and instructions and sustaining accreditation processes across campuses. It also includes menu in providing fair and affordable access to higher learning and new ideas based on the needs and prevailing demands in the global market [5]. It is along this mandate that the College of Engineering and Technology considered the agenda of enhancing the program offerings based on vertical articulation thus, proposes to offer the Master of Engineering Program.

Assessment of Viability of Master of Engineering Program

The participants assessed the viability of Master of Engineering as regards management, market of graduates, financial and operational aspects.

On Management Viability

Assessment on management viability (Table5) considered the qualifications of the faculty members who will be assigned to handle the subjects of the program, as well as the management competence of the college in particular and the university in general. Faculty qualification obtained a mean of 3.45 for the internal stakeholder and 3.09 for external stakeholders.

Table 5. Assessment on management viability of Master of Engineering program

Management Viability	Internal		External		Ave		
	M	D	M	D	M	D	I
1. Qualification of the faculty to handle subjects in Master of Engineering program.	3.45	Vh	3.09	H	3.27	Vh	S
2. Administrative and management competence of the College of Engineering.	3.38	Vh	3.15	H	3.27	Vh	S
Total	3.42	Vh	3.12	H	3.27	Vh	S
Scale: Mean (M)	Description (D)		Interpretation (I)				
3.26- 4.0	Very high (Vh)		Strength (S)				
2.51-3.25	High (H)		Strength				
1.76-2.50	Low (L)		Weakness (W)				
1.0-1.75	Very Low (VL)		Weakness				

This resulted to an average of 3.27 which means very high. Regarding administrative and management competence of the college, it obtained a mean of 3.38 and 3.15 for internal and external stakeholders respectively. This got an average of 3.27 which means very high; thus the total mean of 3.27 interpreted as very high. Consequently, management viability was considered strength of the proposed program. The implication according to [8] is that such business must have an ability to survive, to outlive industry changes and competitor retaliation.

This was validated by the discussants during Focused Group Discussion (FGD) conducted by the researcher which was attended by officials in DEPEd, representatives from Sangguniang Bayan, LGU-Barangay Council and students.

The seven participants assessed positively the management viability of the proposed program. In fact, this area was categorically pronounced by the panel as strength of the college.

Functional faculty development program of the college producing Masters and Ph.D. graduates of the program from prominent universities in the country contributed much to the survey results. The CET faculty profile proved such findings considering that CET has

complied with AACCUP recommendation on faculty development. The current re-accredited Level III status of the BSABE, BSCE, BSEE and BSME undergraduate programs in the college proved this results. The college in manned by highly qualified staff. The dean and department chairpersons are licensed engineers and doctorate and master's degree graduates with vertically aligned specializations. The university's continuous initiative in prioritizing faculty and staff development is counted as strength of the college.

On Market Demand Viability

In terms of market viability, (Table 6) shows that the demand of the industry for MEng in the next 5 years obtained 3.6 and 3.4 for internal and external stakeholders respectively with an average of 3.5 which means Very high. Employment opportunities for Master of Engineering graduates in Romblon and elsewhere was Very high for both internal and external stakeholders with 3.4 average mean. Promotion forecast for Master of Engineering graduates in government and private agencies got 3.4 average mean

Table 6. Assessment on market demand viability of Master of Engineering program

Market Viability	Internal		External		Ave		I
	M	D	M	D	M	D	
1. The demand of the industry for Master of Engineering in the next 5 years.	3.6	Vh	3.4	Vh	3.5	Vh	S
2. The employment opportunities for Master of Engineering graduates in Romblon and elsewhere.	3.5	Vh	3.3	Vh	3.4	Vh	S
3. Promotion forecast for Master of Engineering graduates in government and private agencies.	3.5	Vh	3.3	Vh	3.4	Vh	S
4. Graduates of engineering interested to pursue Master of Engineering at RSU.	3.2	H	3.2	H	3.2	H	S
Total	3.5	Vh	3.3	Vh	3.4	Vh	S
Scale: Mean (M)	Description (D)		Interpretation (I)				
3.26- 4.0	Very high (Vh)		Strength (S)				
2.51-3.25	High (H)		Strength				
1.76-2.50	Low (L)		Weakness (W)				
1.0-1.75	Very Low (VL)		Weakness				

which means Very high also. Graduates of engineering interested to pursue Master of Engineering at RSU obtained mean of 3.2 and 3.2 for internal and external stakeholders respectively with an average of 3.2 which means High. This result is parallel to the 61.1% participants who were willing to enroll the course (Table 4). The total average mean of 3.39 described market viability for the proposed MEng as very high; and therefore regarded as strength of the college.

In the Tracer Study of Graduates of Engineering Programs of the College of Engineering and Technology by [6], the employment rate of graduates of BSABE, BSCE, BSEE and BSME were 84.6%, 88.6%, 100%, and 91.2% respectively which means that the program outcomes were highly needed in the community.

As work standards are becoming more competitive the demand for Master's and Doctorate degree holders in Engineering with specialization in BSABE, BSCE, BSEE and BSME would address the issue. This matter was very well deliberated in the focus group discussion conducted pertinent to this study. In the FGD, no less than the Education supervisor claimed that the demand for Master's degree in engineering had been continuously increasing because of ASEAN integration and issues of competition in the global perspective which was attested by college dean and the rest of the

discussants. The dean explained that the engineers produced by RSU should become ASEAN engineers so that they can work anywhere in ASEAN nations.

In addition, the existing framework of verticalization in professional development observed by SUCs poses a leap in the demand of postgraduate programs like Master of Engineering with any of the specializations.

Also, during the FGD, the principal of Odiongan National High School made an interesting remarks as quoted (unedited); "From elementary, the learners had the choice of their future course. They should focus in their specialization. We have to motivate them, encourage students to have good jobs so that they can build a family and serve our own country".

In addition, the education supervisor suggested to offer the program in his pronouncements when he said (unedited);

"It is very timely to offer the course so that most of our graduates can continue their dreams of taking Master's degree which will be very useful in landing a job especially in other agencies where MS graduates are the priority. Start now, do it now. If you will not pursue this, when will it be? As the Dean do the actual and not only by talking. Discover the reality in offering this

program and also include Sanitary Engineering as an additional program”

Basically this means that graduate programs must be made available and accessible to all the students since it is found relevant.

On Financial Viability

Financial viability (Table 7) in terms of two factors like “Affordable cost of graduate courses in Romblon State University” and “Support of local government towards staff/employee development programs” were looked into. Regarding “affordable cost of graduate courses in Romblon State University”, both internal and external stakeholders perceived these as very high with a mean of 3.6 and 3.3 respectively with 3.4 average mean. Support of employers to staff/employee development programs was perceived as High with 3.2 average mean. With a total average mean of 3.3, financial

viability of MEng is very high and one of the strengths of the CET.

During the conduct of FGD, the school principal reiterated that being the lone University in the province, RSU remains the catchment basin for the graduates of their school and so pursuing Master’s degree in the university RSU is cheaper not only in school fees but also over subsistence of the students. The standard of living in the province is low. The student-discussant in the FGD subscribed to the claim together with other representatives. Ultimately, this becomes an opportunity for the proposed program.

On Operational Aspects Viability

Data (Table 8) showed viability in terms of accessibility of the graduate school and availability of transportation were very high, with average mean of 3.5 and 3.4 respectively.

Table 7. Assessment on financial viability of Master of Engineering program

Financial Viability	Internal		External		Ave		
	M	D	M	D	M	D	I
1. Affordable cost of graduate courses in Romblon State University.	3.6	Vh	3.3	Vh	3.4	Vh	S
2. Support of government and private employers towards staff & employees development programs.	3.3	Vh	3.1	H	3.2	H	S
Total	3.4	Vh	3.2	H	3.3	Vh	S

Scale: Mean (M)	Description (D)	Interpretation (I)
3.26- 4.0	Very high (Vh)	Strength (S)
2.51-3.25	High (H)	Strength
1.76-2.50	Low (L)	Weakness (W)
1.0-1.75	Very Low (VL)	Weakness

Table 8. Assessment on operational aspects viability of Master of Engineering program

Operational Aspects Viability	Internal		External		Ave		
	M	D	M	D	M	D	I
1. Accessibility of the graduate school.	3.8	Vh	3.3	Vh	3.5	Vh	S
2. Availability of transportation facilities.	3.6	Vh	3.3	Vh	3.4	Vh	S
3. Instructional facilities of RSU for of the Master of Engineering Program.	3.2	H	2.9	H	3.0	H	H
Total	3.5	Vh	3.2	H	3.3	Vh	S
	Scale: Mean (M)	Description (D)		Interpretation (I)			
	3.26- 4.0	Very high (Vh)		Strength (S)			
	2.51-3.25	High (H)		Strength			
	1.76-2.50	Low (L)		Weakness (W)			
	1.0-1.75	Very Low (VL)		Weakness			

Summary of assessment on viability of proposed Master of Engineering

Indicators	M	Gap	D	Interpretation
Management viability	3.27	0.73	Vh	Strength
Market demand viability	3.39	0.61	Vh	Strength
Financial viability	3.32	0.68	Vh	Strength
Operational aspects viability	3.34	0.66	Vh	Strength
Total	3.33	0.67	Vh	Strength
	Scale: Mean (M)	Description (D)		Interpretation (I)
	3.26- 4.0	Very high (Vh)		Strength (S)
	2.51-3.25	High (H)		Strength
	1.76-2.50	Low (L)		Weakness (W)
	1.0-1.75	Very Low (VL)		Weakness

However, as to instructional facilities of RSU for the MEng program, both internal and external stakeholders gave a mean of 3.2 and 2.9 respectively which means High. A total average mean of 3.3 means that operational aspects viability was still very high. To attest the result, the 1,267 meter concrete pavement network was constructed through the support of CHED-DAP fund to improve school accessibility and solve perennial problem on rough road network in main campus that turns muddy during rainy season and dusty at summer times [5].

Also, [11] identified some strengths of the university like existence of library system, laboratory structure and facility. However, the weaknesses were aging and obsolete facilities, dilapidated buildings and scarce resources to maintain and improve facilities, no subscription to and remote access to online database and journals, limited library collections, and inappropriate lab supplies and equipment. Considering the findings of [11], the fast changing technology, and the millennial generation characteristics would eventually become a threat to the proposed program if the school fail to prioritize resources towards strengthening the weaknesses identified.

Tablas island particularly Odiongan municipality where RSU College of Engineering and Technology is located has undoubtedly become more developed than 5 years ago. According to [11] the island plays important roles in the province's development. It is the center of business and trade; the provincial plan to develop tourism industry is hoped to open economic opportunities.

Summary of assessment on viability of proposed Master of Engineering

Findings (Table 9) showed that in terms of management, market demand, financial and operational aspects, the viability is Very High. The results were considered strengths of the program. However, there were gaps towards total quality assurance of all the indicators. This implies that the strengths of the proposed program needs to be enhanced further to attain total quality outcomes.

Conclusion

The assessment on the feasibility of offering Master of Engineering with four specializations by both internal and external stakeholders is very proactive and strategic action for

the university. The findings implied that offering of Master of Engineering is feasible, however continuous monitoring and enhancement in the operations should be taken towards commendable outcomes.

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