

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VIETNAM TODAY

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Quality assurance in higher education in Vietnam has appeared since the beginning of 2003, up to now, it has come a long way with certain achievements in the fields of policy development, mechanism building, quality culture formation in many higher education institutions with a rapidly increasing staff of quality assurance. However, in the new context, in addition to favorable conditions, higher education also faces difficulties and challenges that need to be implemented synchronously with many solutions to constantly improve the quality, meet the requirements of higher education, well meet the requirements that the country's reality is setting. This article provides an overview of the quality perspective in higher education in Vietnam through the current stages, systems and mechanisms of higher education quality assurance, along with achievements and issues that need to be resolved in order to continue promoting the implementation of quality assurance of higher education in Vietnam in the current period.

Keywords: *Quality assurance; Condition of quality assurance; Higher education; Ministry of Education and Training; Vietnam.*

1. Introduction

The trend of globalization, international integration and the development of the industrial revolution 4.0 requires Vietnam's higher education to quickly innovate its management to ensure and increasingly improve the quality of training, supply high-quality human resources, promote industrialization and modernization, ensure the country's sustainable development. To carry out this task, education and training in general, higher education in particular, must not only expand in scale but also constantly improve the quality of education and training. Specilaly, in the current context of university autonomy, quality assurance is one of the most important and leading issues of higher education institutions. Higher education quality assurance is considered to be all guidelines, policies, objectives, management mechanism, activities, resource conditions, other measures to maintain and improve the quality of education to meet the set objectives. The higher education quality assurance system includes the internal quality assurance system and the external quality assurance system through the educational quality accreditation mechanism.

2. Research overview

The work of higher education quality assurance is a relatively new issue in Vietnam, so research works on this issue are quite few, some research works related to the research issue can be mentioned as follows: "Concepts about the quality of higher education" (Nghia, 2011); "Assuring the quality of higher education: Restrictions that need to be removed" (Vinh, 2022); "Improving the quality

of higher education in our country today" (Phong, 2023); "Renovation of open higher education in Vietnam: Current situation and solutions Law" (Tuyet, 2022); "Conception of educational quality and effectiveness" (Ry, 2020); "Economic effectiveness of education" (Bao, 2023); "The concept of quality in education and training" (Chi, 2003); "Towards a more complete conception of the quality of education" (Chau, 2004); "Vision on quality of education in Vietnam" (Hac, 2003); "Some theoretical and technical issues in assessing educational development" (Hung, 2004); "Quality and effectiveness of education" (Phuc, 1997);... Research works have focused on analyzing concepts of quality of higher education, quality assurance of higher education, pointing out limitations in the work of quality assurance of higher education in Vietnam today and proposing practical solutions for quality assurance of higher education to achieve goals and requirements of society in the integration period. In addition, it is also worth mentioning the research works of foreign scholars related to the quality assurance of higher education, such as: "Improving Higher Education" (Improving Higher Education) (Barnett, R, 1992); "Defining Quality" (Lee Harvey và Diana Green, 1993); "Quality in higher education: Theoretical overview" (Ehsan, M, 2004);... In general, the above research works are valuable documents, the authors will inherit and complete the content of this research.

3. Research method

The article uses the method of researching documents collected from books, newspapers and the

internet on issues related to quality assurance work in higher education. From the collected data, the author researches, analyzes, evaluates and synthesizes to serve the research issues.

4. Research result

4.1. Theoretical foundations of higher education quality assurance

4.1.1. Some basic concepts

- The concept of higher education quality

“Quality” is a complex term because it is partly practical, partly philosophical, can be understood from many angles, depending on each individual’s stance, it is always relative. Therefore, there have been many different approaches to the concept of “quality”. The concept of quality education is the application of the concept of quality to the field of education.

In the world, over the past decade, there have been many conferences on education under the chairmanship of UNESCO. In those conferences, the quality of education was mentioned and each conference made a statement on a topic of quality education:

+ The Jomtien Declaration (1990) introduced the topic of educational quality associated with expanding learning opportunities for everyone.

+ The Dakar Declaration (2000) provides 10 elements of educational quality for an educational institution.

+ Session 166 of the UNESCO Standing Committee in Paris in March 2003 made recommendations towards a quality education, an education for peace, human rights and democracy, an education for sustainable development.

+ In 2005, UNESCO introduced a structural framework to understand, monitor the improvement of educational quality, including 05 elements: Characteristics of learners; social circumstances; required inputs; teaching and learning process and results.

In the 90s of the last century, Harvey and Green conducted a large-scale study in the UK and concluded that the higher education quality lies in the relationship with its users (stakeholders) and therefore we should favor the subjective school when approaching the issue of “quality” at the University. There are many views on the higher education quality: Quality as exceptional; quality as perfection; quality as fitness of purpose; quality as value for investment money; quality as threshold; quality as transformation...

This article refers to the essence of the concept of quality in relation to higher education, so in our opinion, education quality is the quality as fitness for/of purpose. According to this concept, when assessing the education quality, it focuses on

assessing the level of achievement of educational goals, programs, educational outcomes, educational effectiveness at each level: Individual learners, educational institutions, localities, majors and the entire national education system. This is also the approach to the concept of higher education quality that is agreed upon by many educational managers and researchers. An educational organization or training program is considered to be of quality when it achieves its educational and development goals with appropriate standards, processes, tools and resources.

- The concept of higher education quality assurance

Because of the diversity in the definition of higher education quality, so the definition of quality assurance also has many different approaches.

According to UNESCO, quality assurance is a very broad term referring to a process of continuous assessment (including assessment, monitoring, assurance, maintenance and improvement) of the quality of a higher education system, educational institution and training program. In addition, according to Wilger (1997), quality assurance is a complex process through which universities ensure that the quality of educational processes is maintained according to set standards. Through quality assurance activities, universities can satisfy the school itself, students and others outside the school.

+ Internal quality assurance activities (IQA): Internal quality assurance refers to the policies and mechanisms of each educational institution or training program to ensure that the educational institution or that training program fulfills the objectives and standards applicable to higher education in general or to each professional field in particular.

+ External quality assurance (EQA): External quality assurance involves the activities of a unit outside the educational institution (usually an accrediting organization) that evaluates the activities of the educational institution or training programs to determine whether educational institutions or training programs meet pre-agreed standards.

Internal quality assurance and External quality assurance should not be viewed as opposing or contradictory, but they always exist together. External quality assurance supports and encourages internal quality assurance.

4.1.2. The role and significance of higher education quality assurance in higher education

Higher education quality assurance is the responsibility of all higher education institutions, because educational quality assurance not only serve the goal of external assessment/accreditation of educational quality but are also a fundamental factor to help maintain, improve sustainable training quality, helping higher education institutions adapt,

integrate and compete regionally and globally.

4.2. The affairs of ensuring the higher education quality in Vietnam today

4.2.1. Quality perspective in higher education in Vietnam

In the world, since the 1980s, higher education quality assurance has developed strongly, affecting all levels of the industry, becoming an indispensable and accepted part of academic life, “quality has transformed from a controversial concept to an everyday issue in higher education”. At the same time, quality assurance has become a “professionalized” and internationally connected activity. However, as higher education faces increasingly difficult challenges of globalization and marketization, quality assurance also becomes increasingly complicated. In Vietnam, the perspective of quality, higher education quality assurance is expressed through the following stages:

- Period from 1985 and earlier: Quality = Strict selection:

Vietnamese higher education until the mid-1980s was still essentially elite education. Therefore, during this period, the issue of higher education quality was hardly raised, when the key figures in the training process were students who were considered elite and were carefully selected from the beginning in with strict screening rates. For a long time, Vietnam’s higher education system has believed that education quality management means controlling input through highly competitive entrance exams. During this time, quality assurance is carried out by quality control methods. In addition to input control as mentioned above, output quality is also controlled through examination activities, graduation recognition and issue diplomas according to regulations. Furthermore, quality control of operations is carried out through a system of inspection and testing to monitor core activities. However, the impact and effectiveness of the inspection and control system is not high, because it only emphasizes the detection and punishment of activities that deliberately falsify existing regulations and standards, without setting goals to continuously and comprehensively improve to meet the ever-changing requirements of real life.

- Period of 1986-2003: Quality = Adequate resources

In 1986, Vietnam began a comprehensive reform process, which marked the beginning of the reform of higher education. One of the important goals of the reform of higher education is to strengthen the “supply capacity” of educational institutions, maximize access opportunities for learners. To achieve this goal, within nearly two decades many measures have been taken, as a result, the number of learners as well as higher education institutions in Vietnam has increased dramatically. Higher education has focused on increasing resources (mainly through

tuition contributions from students and funding from the state budget), without paying enough attention to the important role of mechanisms and capacity of leadership and management of the entire system. The view of quality that means adequate resources at this stage is clearly demonstrated through increased funding from the budget for national universities and schools selected for the “key investment” list, while there are no complete mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of resource use to achieve desired goals. Because of this one-sided view, after nearly two decades of reform with the proportion of the budget devoted to education steadily increasing, the education quality has not only not increased but also decreased. This situation shows that the application of new management methods to ensure and improve the higher education quality has become an urgent requirement in the current period.

- Period from 2004 up to now: Quality = Meeting standards

In 2004, marked a turning point in the development of higher education quality management in Vietnam. A series of state management documents at the national level have clearly affirmed the policy of innovating management by applying quality inspection:

+ Resolution No. 37-2004/QH11 of the 11th National Assembly passed on December 3rd, 2004 clearly stated “Taking quality management as the key task; carrying out annual quality inspection”.

+ Directive No. 25/2004/CT-BGDĐT, dated August 2nd, 2004 of the Minister of Education and Training, on the tasks of the entire sector in the 2004-2005 school year, which requires the educational management levels, universities and colleges nationwide “urgently build and perfect the organization, apparatus and implementation of the educational quality testing and accreditation system”.

+ On December 2nd, 2004, the Ministry of Education and Training signed Decision No. 38/2004/QĐ-BGDĐT promulgating the provisional regulation on university quality accreditation. After being applied to higher education institutions, the provisional set of standards has been adjusted and supplemented to become an official set of standards in Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT, dated May 19th, 2017 of the Minister of Education and Training, regulating on accreditation of higher education institutions. The Circular takes effect from July 4th, 2017.

The set of standards for assessing the quality of higher education institutions according to Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT dated May 19th, 2017 has 04 items (fields) including 25 standards divided into 111 criteria, specifically: (1). Section 1: Strategic quality assurance with 08 standards and 37 criteria. (2). Section 2: System quality assurance with 04 standards and 19 criteria. (3). Section 3: Quality

assurance of functional performance with 09 standards and 39 criteria. (4). Section 4: Performance results with 04 standards and 16 criteria.

It can be seen that the 25 standards in the set of standards for assessing the quality of educational institutions cover almost all aspects related to the management mechanism as well as the operational aspects of a modern university, not much different from the standards of regional and international countries. Having a set of transparent standards for university quality management is truly a breakthrough in Vietnamese educational management thinking, showing the determination of the education sector to integrate, with many promises to bring positive changes to the issue of higher education quality in the coming time.

4.2.2. System and mechanism to ensure the quality of higher education in Vietnam today

- Quality assurance system

The introduction of the set of standards for evaluating the quality of higher education institutions according to Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT, dated May 19th, 2017 and the quality accreditation plan based on the above standards must necessarily be accompanied by a system organization and management mechanism to bring this set of standards into reality. Currently, a relatively complete system of quality assurance of higher education is being formed in Vietnam, with the state management agency for national education quality assurance activities being the Department of Education Quality Assessment and Accreditation under the Ministry of Education and Training and other departments of Internal quality assurance standards have been and are being established at educational institutions.

The establishment of the national education quality assurance agency can be said to be a revolutionary change in the organizational and management structure of Vietnam's education sector. The birth of this agency is the result of a process of gradually separating quality assessment from training management. The Department of Education Quality Assessment and Accreditation with the function of professional state management of quality assurance activities of the entire Vietnamese education system, to be the highest-level advisory agency authorized to participate in the decision-making process in policy-level issues such as developing quality standards and regulating the operating mechanism for the quality assurance process of the national education system. It is worth noting that currently having a Quality Assurance department in the organizational structure of a university is a mandatory requirement stated in the quality assessment of higher education institutions (First Set of Standards, December 2nd, 2004 does not have this requirement). With this regulation, so far, the quality assurance system of higher education in Vietnam has been relatively

complete, with the internal quality assurance department in all educational institutions and the external quality assurance agency being the Department of Educational standard Examination and Testing under the Ministry of Education and Training. This is also the model that has been used by two National Universities with their member schools.

- Quality assurance mechanism:

When referring to the education quality assurance mechanism, one of the most important things is to determine the relationship between internal quality assurance (the internal work of educational institutions), external quality assurance (the work of an external organization outside educational institutions) and state management agencies for educational institutions. Depending on its own circumstances and goals, each country will choose an appropriate quality assurance mechanism. Ideally, the two components of the quality assurance system must be completely independent of each other, at the same time independent of the state management agency (Ministry of Education and Training) to separate the three stages: Self-assessment - external assessment and recognition of assessment results.

However, in many cases in developing countries, the state management agency for higher education is also the external quality assurance implementing agency, as the case in Vietnam and some other countries in the region.

According to Lenn (2004), differences in educational quality assurance mechanisms between countries can be summarized in the following four factors: (1) the agency that establishes and operates the quality assurance organization at the national level (Governmental or non-governmental); (2) type or method of external quality assurance activity (inspection, audit or evaluation); (3) funding sources (state or university); and (4) international involvement (with or without international involvement). Considering the above four factors, it can be seen that Vietnam's current higher education quality assurance mechanism lacks diversity and completely dependent on the State, specifically the Ministry of Education and Training: The national quality assurance agency is established by the Ministry of Education and Training, has no independent status for the Ministry because it is an agency under the Ministry; operating funding is provided from the state through the Ministry of Education and Training; there is no participation of international experts in both the decision-making and external evaluation stages... This lack of diversity shows that Vietnam's system of higher education quality insurance is not truly complete and needs to continue to be built to create positive impacts on educational quality as set out in the goals of higher education reform.

4.2.3. Activities to ensure the higher education

quality in Vietnam - Achievements and outstanding issues

- Some achievements

When looking back at the activities that have been implemented in recent years, it can be said that Vietnam's still very young system of higher education insurances has achieved quite a lot of achievements. At the beginning of the 21st century, the entire Vietnamese education sector was completely unfamiliar with quality assurance and quality verification. But just a few years later, mandatory accreditation requirements for all universities and colleges were institutionalized. Some achievements of higher education quality assurance activities in Vietnam in recent times can be stated as follows:

+ Establish a national quality assurance agency (Department of Educational Quality Testing and Accreditation under the Ministry of Education and Training).

+ Developing regulations on university quality accreditation.

+ Initial establishment and continued improvement of the vertical system for national quality assurance activities (Department of Educational Testing and Accreditation, quality assurance centers of the two national universities and regional universities and quality assurance departments of the education institutions).

+ Developing and initially implementing a university quality accreditation plan for the entire Vietnamese higher education system until 2030.

+ Capacity development for experts and key personnel of the national quality assurance system.

+ Participating in regional and international quality assurance networks (mainly two National Universities): AUN (Southeast Asia University Network), APQN (Asia-Pacific Quality Assurance Network), INQAAHE (International Association of Quality Assurance Agencies).

- Some existing problems

Although the activities of higher education quality assurance in recent times have achieved many remarkable achievements, but it would be very wrong to assume that Vietnam has a system and mechanism for quality assurance strong enough to fulfill the important role of catalyst in ensuring and improving the higher education quality. According to international organizations, Vietnam's quality assurance activities are currently entangled in a number of problems that may cause development to stagnate:

+ The quality assurance system at the national level is incomplete, the external quality assurance agency has not been separated from the direct direction and control of the Ministry of Education and Training. The National Council for Accreditation of Educational Quality has not yet been established.

+ The implementation of internal quality assurance standards is still a response to external requirements, not an internal need for the purpose of self-improvement.

+ The current quality assurance mechanism does not create independence between three activities: Self-assessment (performed by educational institutions), external assessment (performed by an independent agency outside the educational institution) and recognition of results (implemented by state management agencies in higher education or associations of universities).

+ The quality standards have not shown the stratification view for the Vietnamese higher education system.

+ There is no system of quality standards to carry out accreditation of training programs; the role of professional associations in accreditation of training programs is still completely absent.

+ Personnel operating in the entire national quality control system are lacking in quantity and weak in capacity.

+ The information system serving the evaluation process is weak and lacking, the transparency of information is low.

The above issues need to be focused on solving in the coming time so that the work of higher education quality assurance can truly take effect, bringing Vietnamese higher education to regional level and gradually reaching international standards.

5. Discussion

The policy of quality assurance in education and training is emphasized in Resolution No. 29/NQ-TW, dated November 4th, 2013 on fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training to meet the requirements of industrialization, modernization in the context of a socialist-oriented market economy and international integration, approved by the 8th Central Conference (Session XI), which requires: "Standardization of conditions for quality assurance quality and management of the training process; focusing on output quality management. Build an independent accreditation system for education and training quality. After 10 years of implementing Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, university training in our country has achieved many important achievements, creating high-quality human resources, promoting industrialization and modernization of the country. However, developing in the new context, in addition to favorable conditions, higher education also faces difficulties and challenges that require synchronous implementation of many solutions to constantly improve quality, meet the requirements of reality of the country is setting out.

6. Conclusion

In the context that society is moving towards a knowledge-based economy in recent years, it is not

surprising that the issue of improving the higher education quality in Vietnam has suddenly become the focus of the education sector. The work of higher education quality assurance is considered as one of the key tasks to serve the purpose of improving the higher education quality. To do this, legal regulations must continue to be improved to ensure that the principles of quality accreditation (independence, objectivity, honesty) are respected according to the law and increase trust of society in the education quality accreditation; heavy regulations

on administrative procedures, lacking expertise and professionalism need to be filtered out; have to overcome limitations in network formation, the cooperation between stakeholders and the application of digital technology in the collection, processing of information according to Big data, the picture of the output higher education quality will be clearer. The work of higher education quality assurance in general and quality accreditation in Vietnam in particular is being formed and developing stably, in accordance with the general development trend of the world.

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CÔNG TÁC BẢO ĐẢM CHẤT LƯỢNG GIÁO DỤC ĐẠI HỌC Ở VIỆT NAM HIỆN NAY

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Công tác bảo đảm chất lượng trong giáo dục đại học tại Việt Nam đã xuất hiện từ đầu năm 2003, đến nay đã đi qua chặng đường khá dài với những thành tích nhất định trên các bình diện phát triển chính sách, xây dựng cơ chế, hình thành văn hóa chất lượng ở nhiều cơ sở giáo dục đại học với đội ngũ nhân sự làm công tác bảo đảm chất lượng tăng nhanh chóng. Tuy nhiên, trong bối cảnh mới, bên cạnh những điều kiện thuận lợi thì giáo dục đại học cũng đứng trước những khó khăn, thách thức cần phải thực hiện đồng bộ nhiều giải pháp để không ngừng nâng cao chất lượng, đáp ứng tốt yêu cầu mà thực tiễn đất nước đang đặt ra. Bài viết này nêu tổng quan về quan điểm chất lượng trong giáo dục đại học tại Việt Nam qua các giai đoạn, hệ thống và cơ chế bảo đảm chất lượng giáo dục đại học hiện nay, cùng các thành quả và các vấn đề cần giải quyết để tiếp tục đẩy mạnh triển khai công tác bảo đảm chất lượng giáo dục đại học tại Việt Nam giai đoạn hiện nay.

Từ khóa: Bảo đảm chất lượng; Điều kiện bảo đảm chất lượng; Giáo dục đại học; Bộ Giáo dục và đào tạo; Việt Nam.