

Management Quality of Higher Education in Vietnam – reflection of Vietnam student

Zarządzanie jakością w szkolnictwie wyższym w Wietnamie – refleksje wietnamskiej studentki

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to provide the overview of current education management situation in Vietnam from the past until now. The paper summarized the definition of quality management and pointed out clearly the weaknesses of Vietnam education's system. Paper includes recommendations and suggestions are proposed to improve the current situation. Paper as a result of cooperation between the Polish teacher and Vietnamese student, who was on the Czech university within the international students' exchange program, includes student's reflections on Vietnamese higher education quality.

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego opracowania jest dokonanie przeglądu aktualnej sytuacji zarządzania oświatą w Wietnamie pod kątem jakości kształcenia. W artykule podsumowano definicję zarządzania jakością w edukacji i wskazano wyraźnie słabości systemu edukacji w Wietnamie. Artykuł zawiera również zalecenia i sugestie proponowane w celu poprawy obecnej sytuacji. Artykuł jako rezultat współpracy polskiego pracownika naukowo – dydaktycznego oraz studentki z Wietnamu, która przebywała na czeskiej uczelni w ramach międzynarodowego programu wymiany studenckiej zawiera refleksje wietnamskiej studentki na temat jakości nauczania w szkolnictwie wyższym.

Key words: education, quality, control, quality assurance

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja, jakość, kontrola, zapewnienie jakości

1. Introduction

Vietnam's development record over the past 25 years is remarkable. Economic and political reforms under *Đổi Mới*, launched in 1986, have spurred rapid economic growth and development and transformed Vietnam from one of the world's poorest to a lower middle-income country. Vietnam has enjoyed strong economic growth. Since 1990, Vietnam's GDP per capita growth has been among the fastest in the world, averaging 6.4% a year in the 2000s.. Vietnam's economy continued to strengthen in 2015, with an estimated GDP growth rate of 6.7 percent. Vietnam's economic activity moderated in the first half of 2016, with GDP expanding by 5.5%, compared to 6.3 percent over the same period in 2015. This slow-down is considered a result of severe drought--affecting agricultural production--and slower industrial growth. Growth has been equitable with a dramatic reduction in poverty and social outcomes have improved significantly. Per capita income in Vietnam has gone from around \$100 in the 1980s to about \$2,100 in 2015 [1,2].

Vietnam has boosted its international economic integration as it has signed a number of free trade agreements, including with the Eurasian Economic Union, the European Union, South Korea, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Vietnam has always prioritized human resource development, achieving some equitable outcomes in basic literacy and numeracy.

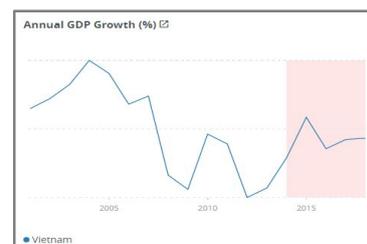


Fig.1. Annual GDP Growth (%) of Vietnam in 2005 – 2015

Source: based on <http://data.worldbank.org/>

The approach to education changed with the launch of *Đổi Mới*, signified by a move from viewing education as part of the “ideology-culture revolution” and a form of welfare to seeing it as a necessary investment in development [2]:

1. The common principle: education and training is the top national priority.
2. The common mission of education and training: raising intellectual standards of the general population, training a skilled workforce, and developing talent.
3. The overall objective: the people are both the goal and the driving force of socioeconomic development.

4. Investment in education and training is considered an investment for development, equivalent to investment in infrastructure such as roads, electricity, the post, and so on.
5. The goal is to promote positive impacts (linking training with the needs of the labor market) while limiting the negative effects of the market mechanism on education and training: resisting the tendency toward commercialization.
6. Everybody provides education, and education is provided to everyone, promoting lifelong learning. Equity in education requires policies that bring education closer to the poor and support outstanding students to develop their talent.
7. The motto for education development: standardization, socialization, diversification, and democratization.

Promotion of learning and respect for teachers are one of the traditional values of the Vietnamese people. At the end of 19th and first half of 20th centuries, the French forcibly colonized Vietnam and the entire Indochina. The traditional Confucian-oriented education, which had been built and maintained by Vietnamese people, was replaced by French-Vietnamese education aimed mainly at training people to serve the colonial apparatus. At the most prosperous period of French-invaded Indochina, Vietnam only had 2,322 elementary schools (for the first 3 years of primary education) with an average of one elementary school for every three villages, and the number of students accounted for 2% of total population; 638 primary schools (for the last years of primary education) with the number of students making up 0.4% of total population; 16 primary colleges (for 4 years of post-primary education) with students accounting for 0.05% of population and 6 secondary schools of which 3 were public with only 0.019% of the population as state secondary students. The whole of French-colonized Indochina had only three universities (of Law, Medicine-Pharmacy and Sciences) located in Hanoi with 834 students, of which 628 were Vietnamese. Under the French-Vietnamese education system, French was the dominant language and the language of instruction at the higher education level. With such an education system, 95% of Vietnamese people were illiterate [4].

Education system in Vietnam is following [5]:

1. Primary Education. The fact that the literacy level in Vietnam stands at 90% may have something to do with the fact that children as young as 18 months of age are admitted to public kindergartens, where they are introduced to arithmetic and the alphabet. Their 12 years of formal education begins at age 6 when they enter compulsory primary school where they will remain for 5 years.
2. Middle Education. Following that they may enter intermediate education *trung hoc so* although this is not compulsory. If they do, they spend 4 years discovering traditional subjects like languages, math and science in preparation for their remaining 3 years at secondary school.
3. Secondary Education. Following an entrance examination that determines the quality of secondary school that they will be allowed to enter, students follow a compulsory school curriculum in which they must complete a wide range of programs in order to graduate. These subjects include Literature/Reading, Mathematics, Calculus, Geometry, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History, Geography, Civics, Foreign Languages, Technology, Information Technology, Physical Education, and Social Studies. Prestigious schools add advanced courses in Natural and Social Sciences.
4. Vocational Education. Since 1987, the Vietnamese authorities have struggled to weld hundreds of vocational colleges into an effective mechanism capable of meeting the labour requirements of a rapidly emerging economy. Two broad programs are offered. These are 1-3 years vocational training, and 2 - 3

years vocational & technical education. Quality is monitored centrally.

5. Tertiary Education. Securing a place at university with a high secondary school grade, and in addition high entrance examination marks is an essential career step, especially for young people from poor or disadvantaged communities. They may leave following completion of an undergraduate degree, or remain on for 2-year doctors or 4-year masters qualifications. The 11 private universities account for just 11% of the total. Although popular, these face challenges in terms of quality and affordability, and, of course legendary Vietnamese red tape too.

Vietnam suffers from an access of low quality universities since the first regulation on the higher education quality assurance was promulgated in 2004 and the Bureau of Testing and Education Quality Assurance under the education ministry was set up a year later. Quality accreditation of higher education is only at a voluntary stage, and many universities haven't met the requirements. According to the ministry regulation, all institutions must have an office in charge of internal quality assurance. Efforts to direct education now focus on specific solutions rather than general directions [3]. Science directions of Vietnam in relation to OECD trends in 2003 – 2015 are presented in Figure 1.

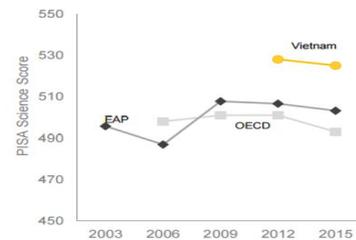


Fig.2. Science trends of Vietnam in relation to OECD in 2003 – 2015 [6]

It can be stated based on analysis of Figure 1, that there is a big difference between Vietnam Science trends and OECD Science trends, what results from the economic and social Vietnam situation. Figure 3 presents Vietnam students' performance in 2012 – 2015, what confirms the highest level in the basic proficiency in reading and the Science meaning growing.

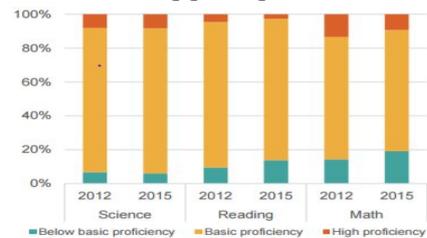


Fig.3. Vietnam students' performance in 2012 – 2015

Source: based on <http://data.worldbank.org/>

Vietnam is a Southeast Asia Country which has been through the long history in the past. The culture and education system was impacted by French and China during the time under control of those countries. In the past few decades, Vietnam tried to move the country forward in term of education and economic. The quality management of education is becoming the hottest issue in modern life due to the importance of itself regarding to the development of the whole nation.

The quality of education is most commonly understood as: "What makes the characteristic and the value of things" or "what makes the nature of things and makes this thing different from others" [6]. This understanding derived from philosophy, from the

concept that everything has two opposite sides: the quality and quantity. The quality defines the nature of the thing not the others. The quality is associated with the existence of things. Quantity shows the similarity of parts within one thing or among different things. Quantity is not associated with the existence of things. To a certain limit, the change in quantity does not change things, but when overtaking this limit, it will constitute a new thing, i.e. the process of quantitative change transforming to the leap in the quality of things and phenomena [7].

In general, quality education is perceived as the values which people and society get from education to apply in life to make everything better.

2. Quality model in Vietnam education context

As mentioned above, Vietnam had been through the different periods of time in the past under the control of outsiders; therefore the education was also changed according to the situation of the country. For each period, different quality managements were applied so in Vietnam from the past to now, the quality management models were diversified from the lowest level to the highest levels such as: quality control model, model of quality assurance.

Quality Control Model - This model was focusing on the final results and eliminated the products which did not meet the quality standard. Everything was decided by final stage in the final examination. According to Sallis (1993), quality control was the oldest quality concept. It involved the detection and elimination of components or final products which were not as good as standard.

In Vietnam, this model existed for thousands of years with Confucianism education. Teaching method was conducted in classes and schools from a few people to several thousands, organized by people almost without any control by the government throughout their teaching. Exams were held periodically (usually every 3 years) by the government to choose passers for the administrative work. Passers became the mandarins and it was also the unique and final goal of learning. This test system ended in 1919 after the French occupied Vietnam, but the impact of this model of quality management as well as the purpose of learning just to test existed continuously and remains heavily in present-day Vietnam education (Dang Ba Lam et. al., 2009).

Quality Assurance is a way of preventing mistakes or defects in manufactured products and avoiding problems when delivering solutions or services to customers; which ISO 9000 defines as "part of quality management focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled".

In Vietnam education, the elements of quality assurance appeared along with the introduction of the Western education system from the French and gradually developed under the new regime up to now. At the moment, the educational institutions in Vietnam obey this point; a quality assurance system, however, is not perfect due to the inconsistency of management from the highest level to lowest level.

In Vietnam's current education, quality evaluation meets many difficulties because Vietnam is in the period of transition from centrally planned socio-economic system with the bureaucratic management, to the modern system in order to integrate and adapt with global environment.

The main problem is still lack of quality standard and inconsistency management. In many universities, the process of recruitment new students will base on the results of national exams, each university will have different standard to choose students. However, after this phase, some schools if they do not have enough students for new academic year, they will lower the requirements

to recruit more students. Therefore it may leads to unqualified candidate after graduation. In addition, there is no standard of teaching or method of learning have given to higher education in Vietnam. Different universities may have different standard according to their philosophy; so how could the quality of education can be measured if it is not consistent at the beginning. Majority of schools mainly focus on theoretical background which are not updated according to the changes in real life and the learning methods are passive because students are always agree with the teachers and the discussions in class are really existed. Those things make the young generation in Vietnam have less competitive advantages comparing to other countries in the world.

The optimal solution for this challenge is putting quality in the first rank, and at the beginning from the highest level to the lowest level, the management of the whole process should be consistent which every higher education institutes have to apply. Bringing some more practical experiences from working environment to student are highly recommended because students not only know about the previous knowledge in the books but also update the experiences in real cases of the working environment. From those changes, the management quality of education in Vietnam would be easier to measure and evaluate whether it matches with standard or not, if there are any problems it is also easier to propose the solutions because they know exactly where is the problem.

9. Summary and conclusions

In sum up, the management of education in Vietnam from the past until now is affected by many factors so it is hard to measure because of lacking the quality standard for the whole nation to follow. In the globalization and integration time, Vietnam should change the way of management of education to be more competitive in the world by adjusting the whole system of management and giving more consistence of standard quality.

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