
**VIETNAM EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT SOLUTION IN THE INTERNATIONAL
CURRENT INTEGRATION**

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is one of the most crucial contents of the national education in the contemporary world. In Vietnam, higher education has been the interest of the Party and State with significant achievements in the development of the human resource during the revolutionary period. However, in the context of innovation and integration, higher education in Vietnam is facing various difficulties and challenges. Elements of international integration are considered one of the fundamental solutions for the further growth of higher education in the country.

Keywords: Higher education, international integration, innovation, educational content, methods of education, quality of education

INTRODUCTION

In most national education systems in the world, higher education is a more sensitive part to international integration. As a response to the increasingly interconnected world of globalization, the organization of higher education in each country must also transform at different levels for adaptation. In line with the general renovation and international integration of the country, higher education in Vietnam also needs reformation. The motto is to meet the global standards and at the same time maintaining the characteristics of the country's higher education during the process of deep integration into the common space of the world.

METHODS

- The subject of the study: the current status of Vietnamese higher education in the context of reform and international integration;
- The article uses general methods such as analysis, synthesis. In addition, the article uses a number of separate as well as interdisciplinary methods such as statistics, collation and comparison.

CONTENTS

Higher education is the stage of education that usually takes place in universities, colleges, academies and technology institutes. Higher education generally includes post-secondary trainings such as undergraduate, graduate, post graduate, and a number of higher education institutions such as vocational schools and business schools which award academic degrees or

professional certificates (*Vietnamese Encyclopedia*, 2013). Of course, in different countries, systems of higher education may be slightly different, but basically the structure of knowledge, age ranges, and levels of education are the same. Tertiary degree-granting institutions, either colleges or universities in the country (*National Center for Education Statistics*, 2012). In the world, higher education consists of the forms of education that grants either academic degrees or certificates.. The basic admission requirement for most tertiary institutions is the completion of secondary education, and the normal admission age is approximately 18 years (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2013).

In Vietnam, although there is no official definition of higher education¹, higher education can be understood to be a form of educational institution for post-compulsory education including several levels of training: college, university, master, and PhD. In comparison with primary education, of which the goal is to popularize education, higher education often aims for a multi-purpose system: a) Training human resources, improving people's knowledge, fostering talents; doing scientific research and technology to create new knowledge and products for service of socio-economic development, national defense and security and international integration; b) Training learners who have political and moral qualities; knowledge, professional practice skills, research and development capacity in applying science and technology commensurate with the level of training; a healthy body; creativity and professional responsibility, ability to adapt to the working environment; a sense of serving the people².

In term of history, higher education emerged in Vietnam a thousand years ago³. Until today higher education in Vietnam has gone through various systems: feudalism, colonialism and new colonialism (in South Vietnam before 1975), socialism. Higher education in the new revolution in Vietnam was born after the revolution of August 1945, nearly 70 years ago. Over the past 70 years, Vietnamese higher education has attained remarkable achievements. The most important achievement is the contribution to generations of human resource of Vietnam which is the decisive factor for the victory of the struggle for national liberation, socialism forming in the North before and the whole country today. However, as the renovation process and the international integration get stronger and in comparison with the requirements of renovation, "the education and training effectiveness is low compared to the requirements, especially in higher education (*Communist Party of Vietnam: Document of the 12th National Party Congress*, 2016; p.113). Especially, in term of the development of the higher education model, the current model of Vietnamese higher education has shortcomings and tends to lag far behind in comparison with that of other countries in the region and over the world. In this paper, we attempt to analyze the limitations and inadequacies of Vietnamese higher education in comparison with the current trends of higher education development all over the world in three aspects: objectives, contents, methods and form of teaching.

In term of target, in a long time and due to different causes, we have not been able to define clear goals of education and training. Education and training have not been considered a breakthrough

¹ Law on Higher Education of Vietnam in 2012 in the interpretation of terms (Article 4) does not have the definition of higher education.

² See Clause 1, Article 5 and clause 1, Article 6 Law on Higher Education in Vietnam in 2012.

³ In 1070, during the reign of King Ly Nhan Tong, the Quoc Tu Giam was built as a place to exam and educate officers for the court therefore it is considered the first university in Vietnam.

as in many developing countries which used to have the same situations as Vietnam. Recently, the concept of the purpose of higher education has been changed to include training talents (*Vietnam Education Law*, 2012). However, the content of the concept 'talent' is not in uniform across documents. If talent is considered to be someone who is initiative, capable and active to contribute an important role in the development whether in the field of theoretical research or practical activities, as those who are outstanding in this society, it is difficult to set this as a goal considering the actual quality of Vietnamese higher education today. In fact, many Vietnamese universities are only capable of equipping learners (students, post graduate,...) with basic knowledge, the spirit of independent analysis, daring to think and thoughtfulness (methodical thought - scientific thought) to promote the possibility of becoming talents. Thus, it is clear that even when we innovate our higher educational goal, it is still inconsistent with the capacity as well as the actual quality of the domestic education. Meanwhile, many countries in the world and even countries with advanced higher education have been more realistic in setting educational goals. According to Dr. Vu Quang Viet, universities in the United States are more modest in setting the goals of higher education (for 4-year mode). They do not focus on training talents but on the foundation of becoming a talent.

A famous university in the United States wrote their university goal as follows: "The purpose of the educational environment and student life is to train successful individuals and responsible citizens. Graduates feel confident in exploring a wide range of issues and experiences in the university environment or in their life, regardless of their academic background." The word "accomplished" can be understood as basic knowledge for confident, careful preparation for life and entrance of the labor market (earning a living as well as developing knowledge). Nevertheless, the purpose of training them into "responsible citizens" is extremely clear (*Vu Quang Viet*, 2007; p.18).

Such purposes are less likely set or made clear by most universities in Vietnam, which is one of the reasons for the decrease of the quality of the products of training (learners).

In terms of content, although there have been many attempts to renovate and reform the content of education at all levels in a more advanced way, in general, our education is still backward in comparison with some countries in the region and in the world, especially our higher education. Most of the content and curriculum at all levels in Vietnam has been compiled or influenced by the educational programs of the socialist countries, in particular from the education of Soviet Union. For a long time, these contents and educational programs have been quite suitable with Vietnamese education and it has brought about important achievements. However, in the background of innovation and international integration today, the Vietnamese higher education curriculum has exposed a lot of inadequacies and limitations, such as:

- The knowledge content of training still focuses on theory, not on practice, which does not create the synchronization of educational objectives and the goal of hunting jobs for learners.
- There is no link among the higher education standards in the country and the general standards of higher education in all over the world. Although it is under the close supervision of the Ministry of Education and Training, in fact, the capacity of knowledge transfer between institutions of higher education in Vietnam is still very limited. Between educational institutions, results of training are less likely to be acknowledged and transferred. Thus, it is very difficult for students to change their major. Transferring knowledge between domestic and foreign higher education institutions is even more difficult due to differences in objectives, contents and

methods of training (except for affiliate program under agreement). Therefore, it is difficult for learners to transfer their education from home to other countries and authenticate their diplomas and certificates issued by Vietnamese institutions.

- The program is also heavy with a lot of credits. A statistic and comparison show that a general four-year program at a university in Vietnam amounts to 2138 hours, compared to 1380 hours in the United States (*Vu Quang Viet*, 2007; p.21) which mean a 60% heavier. With such a huge credit hours, learners are always under pressure of finishing their curriculum and have less time for self-study or participation in other social activities. In general, in the background of international integration, higher education programs in Vietnam are outdated, inadequate and ineffective. This is considered to be the main cause for the current lagging higher education in Vietnam.

The current methods and forms of teaching in Vietnam do not approach the trend of higher education in the world. With the aim of "emphasizing the skill of addressing life problems rather than filling of existing knowledge", the application of teaching methods and forms of teaching at quality universities around the world are very flexible based on the spirit of promoting the role of learners, creating maximum conditions for learners to learn by themselves. However, currently in Vietnam, due to the concept of "education should equip learners with as much knowledge as possible so that they can have a certain foundation upon their graduation" (*Le Minh Khoi*, 2008), the role and position of learners are not really concerned. The methods and form of teaching is quite backward. The results of the US National Academy of Science's fieldwork in 2006 have commented on teaching and learning methods of Vietnamese higher education as follows: "The teaching method is not effective, it depends too much on the lectures and uses less active learning skills, which causes less interaction between students and lecturers in and out of the classroom; Over emphasis on memorizing knowledge by heart without focusing on high-level conceptual or academic learning (such as analysis and synthesis), resulting in superficial learning instead of intensive learning; Students learn passively" (*Ngo Tu Thanh*, 2010). Although in recent years, according to the policy of the Ministry of Education and Training, many universities and colleges in the country have started to apply credit system, many experts still concluded that "credit training in Vietnam is not really in accordance with the spirit of credit. The teaching and learning methods do not still escape the spirit of the yearly mode. Activeness of students are weak" (*My Quyen*, 2012). The innovation of teaching methods in universities is now on theory. Teaching equipment such as projectors are only supportive means for improvement of the teaching quality. More important things such as the awareness that education must be creative and the sense of responsibility expressed through the improvements in methodology and the curriculum have not been paid attention.

The backward higher education in Vietnam has been negatively impacting on various aspects of socio-economic development:

i) The quality of human resources after training has not met the requirements of the society. According to a study at 60 enterprises in the industrial service sector in Ho Chi Minh City, the survey on "Judging the satisfaction of enterprises on the quality of students trained in the first 5 years after graduation" (based on the criteria of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, foreign language proficiency, working style and professional competence) shows that only 5% of the students surveyed are at very good level, 15% at good level, 30% at average level and 40% at failed level (*Thanh Nien Newspaper Online*, 2014).

This result reflects the weakness of current higher education in Vietnam and indirectly indicates a risk: under the condition that enterprises have used automatic technology in human resource management, if Vietnamese labors do not actively improve their professional skills, practice their industrial discipline and their profession, they will be lagging behind colleagues from other countries in the region.

ii) There are also limitations on the ability of researching and publishing research results. Most of the advanced education of countries in the region and in the world today is capable of creating a large team of scientists who are capable of studying and publishing domestic and international research results in large quantity. With the integration trend, the quantity and quality of international scientific publications have become an important measurement. They are the objective indicators of the development of science and technology as well as the scientific efficiency and the quality of education in each country. In Vietnam, despite the interest of many educational institutions in creating a mechanism to encourage scientists to focus on research and publication of domestic and international research results, the outcomes are still limited. Compared with the results of research and publication of many countries in the region and in the world, our ability tends to be lagging behind. According to statistics of the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI), in the past 15 years (1996-2011) Vietnam has only 13,172 scientific publications published in internationally accredited journals, equal to about one fifth of Thailand (69,637), one sixth of Malaysia (75,530), and one tenth of Singapore (126,881). Meanwhile, the population of Vietnam is 17 times the population of Singapore, three times the population of Malaysia, and nearly 50% more than that of Thailand. Vietnam currently has about 9,000 professors and associate professors, 24,000 PhDs and more than 100,000 masters. The number of scientific publications nationwide in the last 15 years is not one fifth as many as the University of Tokyo (69,806 publications) and half of the National University of Singapore (28,070 publications)⁴. The number and the index of influence of the scientific research of Vietnam are both the lowest compared to other countries in the region. This limited rating is also consistent with the number of patents registered in the United States and the inventive index ranked by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

There are many causes for this situation, but the root cause is that the limitation and inadequacies in organizing higher education in Vietnam are less likely to create a team of scientists with the capacity to fully satisfy both the quantity and quality of research.

iii) A weak higher education reduces the competitiveness of the national economy under the condition of international integration. In fact, the inadequacies and limitations of higher education in Vietnam directly affect the degradation of human resources. According to the *Global Competitiveness Report of stage 2013-2014* conducted in 148 countries of the *World Economic Forum* (WEF), the effectiveness of the education system of Vietnam is ranked 67 over 144. In the higher education and training category, among ASEAN countries, Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam are, in order, the top three, while Cambodia ranked at sixth, Vietnam at seventh and Thailand at the bottom. Laos and Myanmar are not ranked by WEF. Under the Higher Education and Training category, Vietnam ranks 95th in the rankings, seventh among ASEAN countries after Singapore (2), Malaysia (46), Brunei (55), Thailand (66), Indonesia (64), Philippines (67). It is worth mentioning that the education-related part is put into

⁴ Prof. Nguyen Van Tuan, New South Wales University, Australia

the 4th (health and basic education) and 5th (quality of education and training) among the 12 key performance criteria for effective competition of the economy (*Lao Dong Online*, 06/09/2013).

The numbers above may not fully reflect the nature of Vietnamese education today but it reminds that we need immediate solutions for effective educational innovation if we do not want to be left behind by other countries in the region and over the world.

During the process of renovation of the country, improving the educational system, including higher education, has always been a concern of the Party and the Government of Vietnam. *The document of the 11th National Congress* of the Communist Party of Vietnam affirms "Fundamentally and comprehensively renovate Vietnamese education in the direction of standardization, modernization, socialization, democratization and international integration". On November 4th 2013, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam continued to issue the Resolution No: 29-NQ / TW on "Fundamental and comprehensive renewal of education and training, meeting the requirements of industrialization, modernization in the condition of socialist-oriented market economy and international integration" (*Communist Party of Vietnam: Document of the 10th National Party Congress* 2011, p.130-131), in which nine solutions for comprehensive education reformation are mentioned. From these nine solutions and based on the analysis at the beginning of the article, we boldly propose some solutions to continue the renovation of Vietnamese higher education under the condition of international integration.

Firstly, it is necessary to develop a philosophy of education at present time. At the same time, each university and educational institution should have its own educational philosophy in line with their principles and objectives and towards to integration into the general development of international education. In order to do so: i) The new philosophy must clearly define the important role and position of education in the development of the country; ii) The new philosophy must define the specific goals of education in accordance with the development of the country in the present period. Successful innovation and integration require us to mobilize and combine a variety of resources, in which human resources play the most decisive role; iii) The new philosophy must define the content and method of education; iv) The new philosophy must clearly define the model of higher education in the new era, such as the document of the 10th National Party Congress, affirming: "To gradually transform the current educational model into an educational model open - social learning model with life-long learning system, continuous training, communication between different levels of study and study; To build and develop a learning system for everyone and flexible forms of study and practice to meet the needs of regular learning; create opportunities and opportunities for learners, ensure social justice in education" (*Communist Party of Vietnam: Document of the 10th National Party Congress*, 2011); v) Each new concept if useful for the cause of education in Vietnam should be concretized into specific guidelines and actions. In this sense, in our view, the new philosophy of education in Vietnam in the process of innovation and integration is now: "Everybody learn, every households learn, learn to reach out to the world and to prosper the country!"

Secondly, the innovation in current education should be "connected to the building of a learning society; ensure quality improvement conditions; standardization, modernization, democratization, socialization and international integration of the education and training system; maintaining the socialist orientation and national identity. By 2030, the education of Vietnam will reach the advanced level in the region" (*Communist Party of Vietnam*, 2013) according to the resolution of the 8th Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of

Vietnam (XI). The Ministry of Education and Training is required to make a drastic change in thinking about higher education institutions, particularized into changes in enrollment options, allowing more higher education institutions to set their enrollment standards and be responsible for their own "prestige", allowing the formation of many different models of higher education, tightly controlling "outcome" of each training facility to ensure overall quality and so on.

Thirdly, innovating strongly the content of curriculum and teaching methods in the direction of international integration. The content of the curriculum and curriculum subjects should be organized and developed in open directions (allowing regular updating of domestic and foreign knowledge, using domestic and foreign curriculums and learning materials in flexible way to teach), the content of teaching must be closely linked with the practical requirements of the profession that trainees are pursuing. Teaching methods in higher education allow the use of a variety of teaching methods based on the principle of "learner-centered", reducing the maximum lecture in class so that learners can have time for self-study. Of course, training institutions should regularly carry out objective and rigorous testing and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Fourthly, renovating the role of governmental administration in higher education institutions under the condition of international integration. Accordingly, in term of legality, it is necessary to continue to supplement and improve the legal provisions on higher education activities. Governmental administrative agencies, especially the Ministry of Education and Training, should change their thinking on management of higher education activities. Rather than a direct management from A to Z for higher education institutions, they should act as "judicial" agencies, orienting the activities under the law, at the same time, it is necessary to facilitate for higher education institutions to be independent and autonomous in their activities. We must avoid enforced or "subsidized" way of management in higher education under the condition of international integration.

Fifthly, strengthening international research and publication activities towards the internationalization of scientific assessment standards and professional activities at higher education institutions. The government and higher education institutions should have incentive policies encouraging scientists to research and actively publish internationally research results. In the long run, it is necessary to set a route (different higher education institutions should have different paths) towards the internationalization of standards for assessment of scientific and professional activities in all higher education institutions, simultaneously this should be considered as an important solution to bring Vietnam's higher education closer to the international environment.

Sixth, change the thinking of higher education in industrial 4.0. Industrial 4.0 has given a new impetus to educational transformation. In recent years, education experts recognize the profound impact that a myriad of technological innovations in ICT is having on education. We agree that Education 4.0 will be shaped by innovations and will indeed have to train students to produce innovations. The picture of industrial 4.0 is still quite fuzzy and it is difficult to accurately predict what lies ahead. Like the industrial revolutions in the past, industrial 4.0 will create new jobs, and will also eliminate some of the existing jobs. It is predicted that routine activities including monitoring will be entirely or partly taken over by machines. For example, IBM Watson has developed AI-based expert system that can replace junior lawyers. AI system

has also been developed, having potential to replace basic-level medical practitioners. This may mean fewer jobs for entry-level professionals in these areas, specialist jobs may remain though (Abdul Haseeb, 2018). However, due to its particularity, the effects of industrial 4.0 on education in general and university education in particular are quite clear in most aspects: content, methods and how to manage higher education.

Vietnam is one of the few countries in the region that have the strength in information technology when applied in the field of education, especially in higher education. However, in the face of the inevitable bedevil of industrial 4.0, there has been a dramatic shift in thinking in the field of education. In the immediate future, it is necessary to boldly change the structure of contents and programs to suit the trend of application of educational technologies. New interdisciplinary programs need to be developed to cater to the future need. As a first step, pilot programs can be developed to cater to a certain sector that will be most influenced by industrial 4.0.

Since professional undergraduate programs are subjected to control/regulation by accreditation bodies, out-of-the-box ideas cannot be introduced here immediately. Therefore a master program in manufacturing that responds to the need of industrial 4.0 can be developed as a first step. It has to be made interdisciplinary combining engineering, ICT and business studies. In the immediate future, Vietnam should quickly complete the development and implementation of the strategy of higher education development in industrial 4.0 to 2020 with a vision to 2030 to create a framework for Vietnam's higher education development. This is in the context of international integration.

CONCLUSION

Vietnamese innovation and international integration process is not only in the economic field but also in almost all fields, including the field of higher education. Vietnamese higher education in the past years has attained certain achievements, but when facing the requirements of innovation and international integration today, it faces many challenges in reforming the educational model in multiple fields (content, quality, methods, and education management mode). If these challenges are not solved properly, they are likely to cause negative effects on many different aspects of social life. Reforming the education model towards international integration in Vietnam today is not only transforming the mindset, it is also necessary to boldly introduce practical solutions to the breakthrough in organization in line with Vietnam's development conditions and step by step reaching advanced values and international practices.

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