Current Policy Measures for Educational Quality Management in Vietnam

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1. Issues in Education Quality Management
1.1. The Difference in the Understanding of Education Quality

In the past few decades, in Vietnam the quality of education has become a hot issue; however when discussing the quality of the education, the first difficulty is the difference in the understandings of education quality. 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” [1].

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 similar of parts within the one thing or among different things. Quantity is not associated with the existence of things. In the certain limit, the change in quantity does not change things, but when overtaking the limit, it will constitute the new thing, i.e. the process of quantitative change transforming to the leap in the quality of things and phenomena [2].

As usual when discussing the quality of education it is normally considered as education values brought to people, to the society, that is the personality changes due to education. But what are the values, and how to measure and how to evaluate them?
The debate of the scientists about the quality of higher education makes the understanding of this concept more comprehensive and richer.

According to Sallis [3]: Some of the confusion over the meaning of quality arises because it can be used both as an absolute an a relative concept. In the absolute definition things which exhibit quality are the highest possible standard which cannot be surpassed. In the relative concept quality can judged to exist when a good or service meet the specification that has been laid down for it.
Pursuant to Peter Newby [4] "Quality education recorded from the educational process so quality not only achieves the quality standard but also beyond standard.

Daniel T. Seymour [5] gave the concept recognized by many people "Quality is the suitability or meet outstanding needs of customers" and "quality is in the system with many process including inputs and output."

In field of education, with specific products as "human", quality of education can be understood as the result (output) of the training process and expressed in particular in the sense, ethics, knowledge, health, aesthetic value ..., creating the personality value and ability to adapt to the social life of graduates, corresponding with the goal of each level in the national education system.

The above of understandings the concept of quality in education are corresponding to some theories of quality: the theory of scare quality (absolute quality), theory of increasing value, theory quality as suitable with the mission and goals of the school.

The most usefull is the latest theory, which:
- Respect and affirm the diversity of mission, historical and environmental characteristics of training institutions. Quality is compared with the tasks and objectives
- Respect and affirm the dynamic of mission and objectives: The training objectives of schools have to express specific circular pile in knowledge, skills, values...
- Target the objectives and encourage action to achieve goals
- Encourage to publicize duties, functions, objectives, expected results of the school
- Build up evaluating criteria based on specific objectives of each field of the school.

The international organizations also have chosen their concepts on education quality
- According to ISO 9000:2000, quality is a level to meet the requirements of a set of inherent characteristics;
- According to SEAMEO, quality is consistent with the purpose
- According to UNESCO (2001) Quality of higher education is a multidimensional concept, including all the functions and training process. Comprehensive education quality involving: Ethics education, knowledge, aesthetic education and phisycal education. Evaluating criteria of quality education (educational products) include:
- Moral qualities, social awareness and citizenship.
- Level of knowledge, skills
- The indicators of physical and mental health, biological ...
- Understanding and harp, aesthetic ability.
- Ability to live and adapt to society.
- Ability to personal development.

1.2. The Diversification of Education Quality Management Models

Management of quality training includes steps such as quality planning, organizing, directing, monitoring, inspection and quality evaluation.

There are management models of quality training from low to high levels: quality control model; model of quality assurance; overall training management quality model (TQM). Activities of quality control; quality audit can be conducted in that model. (Sallis, 1993)

**Quality Control Model**

Characteristic of this model is focus on final examinations to eliminate persons who do not meet quality standards. Evaluating activities are carried out only in the last stage of the training process. Quality is assured only by the test results.

According to Sallis (1993), quality control is the oldest quality concept. It involves the detection and elimination of components or final products which are not up to standard. It is an after-the-event process concerned with detecting and rejecting defective items. As a method of ensuring quality it may involve a considerable amount of waste, scrap and reworking. Quality control is usually carried out by quality professionals known as quality controllers or inspectors. Inspection and testing are the most common methods of quality control, and are widely used in education to determine whether standards are being met.

In Vietnam, this model existed thousands of years with Confucianism education. Teaching-learning is 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 was held periodically (usually 3 years) by the 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 heavily in the present Vietnam education [6].

**Quality Assurance Model**

Quality assurance is different from quality control. It is a before and during-the-event process. It concern is to prevent faults occurring in the first place. Quality is designed into the process to attempt to ensure that the product is produced to a predetermined pecification. Simply quality assurance is a means of producing defect and fault-free products or Zero defect producing. Quality is made the responsibility of the workforce, usually working in the cells or teams, rather than the inspector, although the inspection can have a role to play in quality assurance.

The quality of the good or service is assured by there being a system in place, known as a quality assurance system, which lays down exactly how production should take place and to what standards.

In VN education, the elements of quality assurance appeared along with the introduction of Western education system from French and gradually developed under the new regime up to now. At present, the educational institutions in Vietnam obey this point; quality assurance system, however, is not perfect and very reasonable.

According to Vietnam Standard TCVN 5841: "Quality assurance is all activities which are systemetically planned and conducted in the quality system proved to be necessary to create sufficient confidence. The object will fully satisfy quality requirements”. That is the system of measures, planned activities which are conducted inside and outside the school to ensure that graduated students will meet all the requirements on quality expected items.
**Over training quality model (TQM model)**

According to Sallis (1993) TQM incorporates quality assurance, and extends and develops it. TQM is about creating a quality culture where the aim of every member of staff is to delight their customers, and where their organization allows them to do so. In the quality definition of quality the customer is sovereign.

The application of TQM in education requires the management of input (students recruitment, investment to the institution, teaching staff, infrastructure, curricula, research staff); Management of performance process (learning-teaching plan and its implementation, assessment, inspection); Management of output (performance result, the level of the satisfactory).

TQM process includes environment analysis, goal setting, strategies and priorities setting, using working groups. TQM is the best quality management because it will bring a lot of benefits: enhancing the responsibilities, reducing the cost, service orientation, improve the concurrent ability.

Some advanced higher education institutions in VN attempt to apply TQM in their organization, but they can do only the very first steps. In VN higher education system at present time the sandwich of different models of quality management: the quality control still has a strong root, quality assurance is a popular model and TQM is a future expected.

1.3. **The Difficulty of Education Quality Measurement in the Context of Value System Changing**

When applying the concept and theory of quality management in order to assess the quality of education the academics are facing the difficulties in determining criteria to represent quality and standards which can help to judge the level of quality attained. Some of the criteria and standards can be determined by quantitative calculation; the others can only be expressed by qualitative means.

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 market one in order to integrate into the
international market with more flexible management style, derived from the grass-root level. In the society, value orientations are changing and learning motivation of the youth also changes. Changes are mainly in the orientation value namely:

- Highly appreciating collective benefits is switched to the association of the collective benefits and individuals;
- Highly appreciating spiritual values is transferred to the joint of spiritual interests and material benefits;
- The equal low income in society is transferred to encourage the enrichment and accept the discrepancy between the rich and the poor in the society.

In education, ensure basic education for people with universalization education policy simultaneously expanding education at higher levels for population groups with favorable conditions. Under the impact of the market mechanism, study opportunities of the poor to higher level will decrease. The poverty had impact learning readiness, innovation ability and the access to computers and modern media. In current policy, the Vietnamese Government does not reduce but increase the budget for education; especially helping the poor is the way to create the equity in education under the market’s impact.

According to official evaluation for Vietnam education, the quality and efficiency of education – training is still low. Level of knowledge, practical skills and methods of scientific thinking, mastering of foreign languages and physical strength of most students are weak. For many graduated students, the ability to apply knowledge in production and life is limited. Most graduates are not able to adapt to the rapid changes in industry as well as in technology.

The educators agreed that students have not been equipped with communication skills while they were in H. E. institutions; therefore, their communication ability only gains the average level even very poor which prevent them from creating their work relations. Although students learn foreign languages and information technology in extra time, the majority of graduates can not use the foreign language in professional communication and only uses computers to do simple office work.
In terms of professional aspect, most graduates face difficulties before the practical issues and fewer of them are not equipped with individual working skills and self-learning skills. Institutions have to invest more time to foster these staffs at an acceptable level. Low quality of output is the consequence of inputs, conditions and process of teaching and learning is low. Funding for training per student from the government is low as compared with other countries in the region. Teachers have inadequate professional qualifications. Teachers of economics and other sectors related to the conversion market are not systematically equipped with additional knowledge.

A warning problem of higher education in Vietnam is that testing and assessment. It is primarily to test the remember ability, not orient on the ability of applying knowledge to new situations. It can be assumed that the quality of graduates and the quality of education and training in Vietnam does not meet the requirements of economic and social development as well as user’s desire.

2. The Challenges in Setting the Education Quality Management System in VN
To build an effective quality management system, Vietnamese Education is facing the following challenges.

2.1. Lack of implementation criteria and quality standards
Vietnam Education Laws (2005) [7] have the article on the autonomy and responsibility of the school. Along with strengthening the decentralization process, universities have more and more autonomy in the student recruitment, training process, deciding graduation, tuition fees ... In certain circumstances, some schools have not used properly their rights to increase the quality of training and did reversely such as: lower the input requirements, exceed enrollment of the training capacity, too high percentage of students/teachers, open the faculties according to the tastes of society while the schools have not had sufficient training conditions. That situation requires to urgently building a system of indicators and criteria to guide and monitor the implementation of universities.
2.2. Apparatus, mechanisms and staff changes have not keep up with the new management

In the new management mechanism, decentralized higher education institutions self decide and take responsibility for management decisions in accordance with issued regulations. The state managerial agencies have to concentrate on the construction of policies, regulations, guidelines and inspection of the implementation. However, current higher education institutions as well as state agencies still work pursuing to old habits: the institutions are not active in management decisions and still waiting for the advice from the upper level of management, while state agencies are doing implement the work of the grass-root level. Abandon old habits and build work capacity in the quality management system is a new challenge for management staff at all levels.

3. The Measures to Overcome

3.1. New Education Policy: Quality in the First Place

The socio-economic strategic plan for 2001-2010 states that: in order to respond to the requirements of human and human resources, which are the decisive factors for the country’s development in the period of industrialization, modernization, it is necessary to create radical and overall changes in education. Therefore the goals of Education Development Strategic Plan for 2001-2010 are:

- To create radical changes in education quality in the direction of a closer access to the advanced level of the world, suitable to the Vietnamese practice, practically serving the socio-economic development of the country, regions, and localities; and in the direction of a learning society. To strive to bring our country’s education out of left behind position in some aspects in comparision with developed countries in the region.

- To give the priority to the enhancement of the quality of manpower training special attention should be paid to training of highly qualified science-technology personnel, excellent managerial staff, skillful business managers, skilled worker-masters, who will contribute directly to the enhancement of competitiveness of economy; the priority is also given to accelerating the universalization of lower secondary education.

- To innovate goals, contents, methods, curricula at all levels; to develop teaching staff satisfying the increase of enrolment and the improvement of quality, effectiveness and the innovation of teaching-learning methods; to innovate the education management; to create legal basis and to bring into play the internal forces for education development. [8]
3.2. New Set of Curricula, Modes of Delivery and Assessment

Objectives, contents, curricula of education are renovated toward standardization, modernization; closer access to the advanced countries, at the same time should be relevant with the manpower demand of the country. In higher education to carry out strong innovation of curricula in the direction of diversification, standardization, modernization, to create conditions for quick, selective adaptation of curricula of developed countries closely satisfying country’s requirements and practically serving the socio-economic development of the country.

To renovate examination systems, enrolment procedures, to build up the systems for evaluating the quality of training, teaching staff, student’s achievement, to overcome the examination oriented characteristic of current education.

3.3. New Established Quality Supporting Organisations: Education Testing Centres and Accreditation Offices

To facilitate the improvement of education quality assessment, Vietnam undertook measures to improve the assessment of student’s achievement and conduct of the accreditation of education institutions.

In the first aspect, testing centers were established in the Education and Training Ministry, in provincial education offices and in H.E. institutions to assist the edit and selection of standardized tests, to construct of test bank, to select of scoring equipment as well as to organize external examinations.

In the second aspect, quality accreditation is a process, internal and external evaluating results according to the quality standards.

Quality accreditation is an organizational system and measures to evaluate training quality (output) and other conditions to ensure training quality standards
Training institutions are certified to achieve these standards, basic standards of sources and indicators so as to improve quality and encourage self-assessment, strengthen self-management and ensure that facilities training standards achieved quality basic standards (Stanley & Patrick, 1998).
Training quality accreditation has two levels: institution and program level. VN initially conducted the training quality accreditation in the universities. Today there are different accreditation agencies in the world:
- State organizations such as: Bureau of Higher Education Standards belong to the Ministry of University Affairs – Thailand (1996-8/2002); Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment (ONESQA); The Korean Council for University Education; The Quality Assurance Division – The Higher Education Department, China; National Agency for Higher Education; Sweeden; National Accreditation Agency (Holland).
- Association accreditation organizations such as: Association of University in the Netherlands (VSNU); Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), USA; The Higher Learning Commission/North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, USA.
- Mixed organizations: Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) có hình thức như một công ty phi lợi nhuận có đại diện của nhà nước và các thành viên do các liên đội (stakeholder) bầu ra; Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), UK; National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). India.

Vietnam held an accreditation agency of the state as a Department of the Education and Training Ministry and also conducted several accreditation activities in some University with the hope that the quality management in education will improved.
References

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3. Sallis (1993), TQM in Education