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MODELS OF EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE WORLD AND THEIR APPLICABILITY IN VIETNAM

Abstract. The article will show models of quality assurance in higher education in the world. Thereby, it will provide necessary information and applicability at higher education institutions in Vietnam to review and develop an appropriate system of policies, documents, and guidelines on quality assurance in education and enhance the quality of higher education.

Keywords: education quality assurance, higher education, Vietnam, education quality accreditation

1. Stating the problem

In educational activities, quality is the core factor creating long-term development for all higher education institutions. The ultimate aim of universities' activities is to train learners with knowledge and skills based on the effective use of available resources. At this time, quality assurance is considered a regular and ongoing task of universities. Therefore, it shall be implemented by specialized units to continuously improve the quality of education, scientific research, and international cooperation of universities [3].

2. Views on quality and quality assurance in higher education

Quality in higher education is considered a multidimensional concept that covers a wide range of functions and activities, including teaching and training programs, research, scholarship, personnel, learners, facilities, community

services, and academic environment. Therefore, independent experts' internal self-assessment and external assessment play an essential part in improving quality in higher education [1].

It can be said that quality assurance in higher education is systematic management and evaluation processes to monitor the activities performed by higher education institutions/schools, ensure output standards, and improve quality. According to the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), quality assurance in education includes viewpoints, guidelines, policies, objectives, actions, tools, processes, and procedures. Through their presence and use, we can ensure that the educational mission and goals will be fulfilled and standards are being maintained and enhanced.

Quality assurance in education is a mandatory requirement and responsibility of all higher education institutions. In addition, it is used for external evaluation and is an essential factor in maintaining, improving, and strengthening the training quality at each university. In particular, internal quality becomes a decisive factor in the training quality in increasingly strong international integration.

With the increase in the number of learners globally and in Asia-Pacific, especially in developed countries, higher education is becoming increasingly diversified and popularized. Due to the requirements for quality and quality control, Quality Assurance Agencies (QA) have been established. Currently, in Asia - Pacific, there are more than 100 countries with quality assurance system, linking with the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) (that currently has over 200 QA organizations), the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), Bologna Process, and Washington Accord ... towards diversification or internationalization in unifying the model of quality assurance in higher education [8].

3. Models of quality assurance in higher education in the world

Overall, the quality assurance systems in higher education of more than these 100 countries are based on some typical models of quality assurance as follows:

BS 5750/ISO 9000 Model

According to Dr. Nguyen Kim Dung (2009), the essence of the BS 5750/ISO 9000 model is a system of documents stipulating standards and detailed and rigorous process at each stage of the production process, ensuring that every product or service is fit for output and “fit for purpose”. However, this model is unfamiliar to higher education. In addition, the language used in its set of standards is not appropriate due to its origin, which is from commodity production. In the 1980s and 1990s, besides the managerialism and marketing movement, ISO was applied in the business sector and higher education (Russo, 1995). Unlike quality control, it was not an inspection system because it required certificates. It was aimed at the manufacturing sector and organizations trading in specific items. As a result, its standards had to be accurate and stringent (Russo, 1995). However, ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is currently a tool for quality management according to international standards. Its objective is to enhance the standardization of quality and relevant activities for the international exchange of goods and services and promote economic activities, science and technology, and knowledge [2].

Model for Total Quality Management - TQM

The TQM model is a comprehensive quality assurance and control system. In this model, inspection, evaluation, and quality improvement are carried out continuously to detect errors, helping us correct them immediately. Inspecting, evaluating, and improving happens regularly to enhance the operating quality of the system gradually. Currently, this model has been used by many advanced universities in the world. Theoretically, the TQM model requires all departments and employees of an organization to engage in (Ellis, 1993; 1993a). However, although it is considered an effective system for quality

assurance in the business sector, only a few universities consider applying it in their educational activities. This trend shows that most schools still doubt its effectiveness in their professional fields. Some schools that consider using TQM just apply it in management fields that are more like business management or industry. However, this model does not impose a rigid system on any institution but creating a “culture of quality” covering the entire training process [5].

The EFQM Model

The European Foundation for Quality Management Model (EFQM) was introduced in early 1992 and is considered an application standard for European quality assessment. Its basis consists of the Total Quality Management (TQM) concept. This model is developed according to the PDCA cycle (Plan - Do - Check - Act cycle), showing the relationship among the management stages. In addition, it is based on nine criteria. Five of them are “enablers,” and the remaining four criteria are results. Specifically, “enablers” include tasks an organization must do, and “results” are its achievements. “Results” are based on the “enablers,” and feedbacks from “results” will improve the efficiency of “enablers.” Moreover, the EFQM is built on accomplishing tasks, relationships with customers, people, and society via leadership to develop policies and plans, producing good results. Policies are distributed depending on resources and processes shared by partners. The following table will depict the EFQM model:

Most European universities have adopted the EFQM model for the management of new education quality of higher education. It is based on principles of the TQM model to define criteria and levels of each criterion to assess the level of management in a unit. When applying this model, universities will find suitable short-, medium- and long-term decisions to promote internal resources and take advantage of external forces for the rise and development like other advanced universities [6].

Model of quality assurance of the U.S.

Quality assurance is a systematic planning process used to evaluate a program or set educational standards at a higher education institution. Universities mainly combine self-regulation with accreditation by professional non-governmental organizations (accrediting courses) and regional accreditation associations (accrediting universities). In the US, the assessment and accreditation of universities are considered one of the most critical steps in determining the program's quality and the value of the degree.

Three main types of accreditation exist in the universities and colleges in the U.S.: regional, national, and programmatic.

Except for programmatic accreditation that focuses on some specialized academic programs, the remaining two types of accreditation are the most common. Regional accreditation will reflect the characteristics of training trends, recognized quality, and the value of degrees awarded by a school. To know what type of accreditation a school belongs to, we can look at its accreditation agency. In the U.S., there are currently six regional accreditation agencies and some national accrediting agencies that have been recognized, for example, the ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology, Inc.) and the AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business). They are independent institutions accredited by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). The most important thing is that CHEA is a higher education accrediting organization that certifies legal accrediting organizations in the United States [9].

The critical feature of accreditation in the United States is to hold institutions accountable for the training quality while also providing an incentive to enhance it. Regarding the content of program accreditation, schools have determined that accreditation will assess input factors and focus on the training process and the quality of graduates.

In short, the American system of quality assurance and accreditation is an autonomous one reflecting American culture. Although many organizations perform quality assurance, only legally qualified institutions and accredited by the U.S. Secretary of Education (USDOE) or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) are legal. Accreditation in the United States performs two functions: quality assurance to society and quality improvement to colleges. Moreover, it possesses recognizable characteristics such as non-governmental, honest, and voluntary.

The AUN-QA model

In recent years, one of the primary measures to promote higher education in Southeast Asia is to build a network of Southeast Asian universities (ASEAN University Network - AUN) and a quality assurance system of the network of Southeast Asian universities (AUN - QA). The AUN-QA aims to develop a common set of quality standards by sharing experiences and good examples. Since 1998, AUN has debated initiatives and developed a quality assurance model that includes strategies, systems, and tactics, internal quality assurance (IQA), and external quality assurance (EQA), including quality verification. In particular, internal quality assurance (IQA) ensures that an educational institution has a system or program with policies and operating mechanisms that meet goals and standards. On the other hand, external quality assurance (EQA) is performed by an organization or individual outside of an institution to evaluate its performance, system, or program and determine how well it meets the standards [9].

To help member schools have an internal quality assurance system, AUN has built an IQA model consisting of testing tools, assessment tools, QA processes for specific activities, specific QA tools, and continuous activities for quality improvement.

4. Comparing with models of international quality assurance and presenting the current situation of quality assurance in higher education in Vietnam

Most documents of quality assurance and accreditation organizations across the world discuss issues of quality assurance in higher education and quality assurance systems in universities. Besides, intense competition in higher education has led to substantial changes throughout the world in recent years. From here, quality is considered a significant concern in universities [4]. As a result, they have made efforts to create quality assurance mechanisms for:

- Proving to the public and the Government that universities can provide high-quality education service.
- Ensuring that the quality is worthy with the funding that schools receive from the Government. Beneficiaries and students are the primary subjects.
- Attracting local and international students.
- Participating in trends of marketization of higher education.

In recent years, the activities carried out have proved that although the quality assurance system in higher education is still new in Vietnam, it has achieved many accomplishments. The success was shown clearly at the beginning of the 21st century when the whole Vietnamese education sector was still unfamiliar with the concept of quality assurance and accreditation in education. However, a few years later, quality accreditation became mandatory for all institutionalized universities and colleges. In recent years, the quality assurance in higher education in Vietnam has gained some typical achievements, such as:

1. Establishing a national quality assurance agency (Department of Educational Testing and Accreditation - Ministry of Education and Training).
2. Developing regulations on quality accreditation for universities;
3. Starting to establish and perfecting the system in parallel with activities for the national quality assurance (Department of Educational Testing and

Accreditation, quality assurance centers of two national and regional universities, and the department of quality assurance of universities).

4. Developing and starting a plan for quality accreditation for the entire higher education system of Vietnam by 2010;

5. Carrying out capacity development for experts and key personnel of the national quality assurance system;

6. Participating in networks for regional and international quality assurance (mainly two national universities): Asian University Network (AUN), Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Although the work of quality assurance has reached many remarkable achievements in recent years, there are some problems as follows:

1. Firstly, the quality assurance system at the national level is incomplete. It depends on an external quality assurance agency when it is no longer under the direct supervision and control of the Ministry of Education and Training. Besides, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has not been established yet.

2. Secondly, internal quality assurance is implemented evasively based on external requirements rather than an internal drive for self-improvement.

3. Thirdly, the current quality assurance mechanism has not yet created independence among the three activities like self-assessment, external assessment, and recognition of results.

4. Fourthly, the quality standards don't represent the view of stratification for the education system in Vietnam.

5. Fifthly, there are no quality standards for accrediting training programs. Moreover, professional associations haven't fulfilled their responsibility in accrediting training programs yet.

6. Sixthly, the number of people working in the national quality assurance system is insufficient. Furthermore, their ability is inadequate.

7. Lastly, the information system that supports the assessment process is ineffective and insufficient. Besides, its transparency is still low.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Like many other countries, Vietnam needs a model of education quality assurance and accreditation for sustainable development and positive impacts on maintaining and continuously improving educational standards, which will create transparency about the current state of education and mutual trust in education cooperation among international partners.

After about ten years of establishment and development, the quality assurance model of higher education institutions in Vietnam is built based on learning experiences and referring to models of many countries worldwide, such as the quality assurance model of the US and European countries. In addition, the model for Vietnam's education quality assurance is influenced by other countries in the Asia-Pacific region due to many cultural similarities. Therefore, it will be convenient to cooperate for mutual development and exchange practical experience in this field. The influence of the quality assurance model of other countries on Vietnam's one is mainly through bilateral cooperation and support of international organizations, such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN), ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN), SEAMEO and some other countries such as Australia and the Netherlands.

Thanks to approaching many models of quality assurance and accreditation in the world and the region, the model of education quality assurance in Vietnam is gradually being stabilized and is consistent with many other countries' ones, especially Europe, Asia - Pacific, and AUN that are further developed on the typical model of Europe and America. However, we should fulfill the following things so that Vietnam's quality assurance model can develop sustainably:

1. Firstly, we should attempt to build a quality assurance system in educational institutions to gradually form a quality culture and make all school members understand, focus on, and desire to strengthen the quantity of education.

2. Secondly, it is necessary to improve the teaching quality assessment, program evaluation, internal audit, and application expansion. Besides, self-assessment is considered a tool to enhance the quality of education.

3. Lastly, it's essential to strengthen the autonomy for centers for education accreditation to ensure objectivity in assessment. Thanks to that, the quality of higher education institutions will meet international and regional standards. Moreover, we should improve the capacity of domestic experts because external assessment will objectively reflect the status of higher education institutions from external perspectives.

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