

Current Policy Measures for Educational Quality Management in Vietnam

Nguyen Thi My Loc

(University of Education, VNU in Hanoi, Vietnam)

1. Issues in Education Quality Management

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” (Vietnamese Dictionary, 1998, p. 20).

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 (Philosophy dictionary, 1986).

As usual when discussing the quality of education it is normally considered as education values brought to people, to the society, so that the personality changes due to education.

But what are the values, and how does one measure and 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 (1993), some of the confusion over the meaning of quality arises because it can be used both as an absolute and as a relative concept. In the absolute definition things which exhibit quality are of the highest possible standard which cannot be surpassed. In the relative concept quality can be judged to exist when a good or service meets the specification that has been laid down for it.

Pursuant to Newby (1999), quality education is derived from the educational process so quality not only achieves the quality standard but also goes beyond the standard. Seymour (1993) gave the concept recognized by many people that Quality is the meeting the needs or exceeding the needs of customers and quality is in the system with many processes including inputs and output” (Seymour, 1993).

In the field of education, with the 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, and aesthetic value, in 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 understandings of the concept of quality in education correspond to some theories of quality: the theory of scarce quality (absolute quality), theory of increasing value, and the theory of quality as suitable with the mission and goals of the school.

The most useful is the latest theory, which:

- Respects and affirms the diversity of mission, historical and environmental characteristics of training institutions. Quality is compared with the tasks and objectives
- Respects and affirms the dynamic of mission and objectives: The training objectives of schools have to express a specific circular development in knowledge, skills, and values
- Targets the objectives and encourages action to achieve goals
- Encourages the publicization of duties, functions, objectives, and expected results of the school
- Builds up evaluating criteria based on the specific objectives of each field of the school.

International organizations also have chosen their concepts on education quality as follows:

- By ISO 9000:2000 standards, 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 the training process. Comprehensive education quality involves: Ethics education, knowledge, aesthetic education and physical 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
 - Understanding and sharp, aesthetic ability.
 - Ability to live and adapt to society.
 - Ability to personally develop

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: the quality control model; model of quality assurance; and total quality management model (TQM). Activities of quality control and quality audits can be conducted in that model (Sallis, 1993).

Quality Control Model

Characteristic of this model is to focus on final examinations to eliminate products that do not meet quality standards. Evaluating activities are carried out only in the final 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 for 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 were held periodically (usually every 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 remains heavily in present-day Vietnam education (Dang Ba Lam et. al., 2009).

Quality Assurance Model

Quality assurance is different from quality control. It is a before and during-the-event process. The 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 specification. 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 cells or teams, rather than the inspector, although 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 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 present, the educational institutions in Vietnam obey this point; a quality assurance system, however, is not perfect nor very reasonable.

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 the staff is to delight their customers, and where their organization allows them to do so. In the definition of quality the customer is sovereign.

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

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

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

3. The Difficulty of Education Quality Measurement in the Context of a Changing Value System

When applying the concept and theory of quality management in order to assess the quality of education, academics are facing 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 a centrally planned socio-economic system with bureaucratic management, to a market one in order to intergrate into the international market with a more flexible management style, derived from the grass-root level. In the society, value orientations are changing and the learning motivation of the youth also changes. Changes mainly in the orientation value are namely:

- High appreciation for collective benefits has switched association to the collective benefits of individuals;
- High appreciation for spiritual values has transferred to a combination of spiritual interests and material benefits;
- The equality of a low income society has transferred to encourage the enrichment and accept the discrepancy between the rich and the poor in society. In education, to ensure basic education for people with a universalization education policy simultaneously expands education at higher levels for population groups with favorable conditions.

Under the impact of the market mechanism, study opportunities for the poor to advance to a higher level will decrease. Poverty impacts learning readiness, innovation ability and the access to

computers and the modern media.

In the current policy, the Vietnamese Government does not reduce but increases the budget for education; especially helping the poor is the way to create equity in education under the market's impact.

According to an 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 graduating 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.

Educators agreed that students have not been equipped with communication skills while they were in higher education institutions; therefore, their communication ability only gains to the average level which is even very poor and prevents them from creating work relations. Although students learn foreign languages and information technology in their extra time, the majority of graduates can not use the foreign language in professional communication and only use computers to do simple office work.

In terms of the professional aspect, most graduates face difficulties before practical issues and few of them are equipped with individual working skills and self-learning skills. Institutions have to invest more time to foster staff at an acceptable level.

Low quality of output is the consequence of inputs, conditions and the 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 for higher education in Vietnam is testing and assessment. It is primarily to test the memorization ability, not orient the ability to apply 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 at the level the users desire.

4. The Challenges in Setting the Education Quality Management System in Vietnam

To build an effective quality management system, Vietnamese Education is facing the following challenges:

- Lack of implementation criteria and quality standards
The Education Law of Vietnam (2005) has an article on the autonomy and responsibility of the school. Along with strengthening the decentralization process, universities have more and more autonomy in student recruitment, the training process, deciding graduation and tuition fees. In certain circumstances, some schools have not properly used

their rights to increase the quality of training and did the reverse such as: lowering the input requirements, exceeding enrollment of the training capacity, maintaining too high of a percentage of students/teachers, and opening the faculties according to the tastes of society while the schools did not have sufficient training conditions. That situation requires the urgent building of a system of indicators and criteria to guide and monitor the implementation of universities.

- Apparatus, mechanisms and staff changes have not kept 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 the inspection of the implementation.

However, current higher education institutions as well as state agencies still work pursuing old habits: the institutions are not active in management decisions and still wait for the advice from the upper level of management, while state agencies are implementing the work at the grass-root level. To abandon old habits and build work capacity in the quality management system is a new challenge for management staff at all levels.

5. The Measures to Overcome

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 and modernization, it is necessary to create radical and overall changes in education. Therefore the goals of the Education Development Strategic Plan for 2001-2010 are:

- To create radical changes in education quality in the direction of 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 from a left behind position in some aspects to a comparison with developed countries in the region.
- To give priority to the enhancement of quality manpower training, special attention should be paid to the training of highly qualified science-technology personnel, excellent managerial staff, skillful business managers and skilled worker-masters, who will contribute directly to the enhancement of the competitiveness in the economy; the priority is also given to accelerating the universalization of lower secondary education.
- To innovate goals, contents, methods, and curricula at all levels; to develop teaching staff to satisfy the increase in enrolment and see to the improvement of quality, effectiveness and the innovation of teaching-learning methods; to innovate the education management;

to create a legal basis and to bring into play internal forces for education development (Vietnamese Government, 2001).

6. New Set of Curricula, Modes of Delivery and Assessment

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

Furthermore, attention should be given to renovate examination systems, enrolment procedures, to build up systems for evaluating the quality of training, teaching staff, student achievement, and to overcome the examination oriented characteristic of current education.

7. 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 for 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 higher education institutions to assist and edit the selection of standardized tests, to construct of test bank, to select scoring equipment as well as to organize external examaminations.

In the second aspect, quality accreditation is viewed as a process with internal and external evaluating results according to the quality standards. Quality accreditation is an organizational system with measures to evaluate training quality (output) and other conditions to ensure training quality standards.

Training institutions are certified to achieve these standards, and basic standards of sources and indicators so as to improve quality and encourage self-assessment, strengthen self-management and ensure that facilities training standards achieve basic quality standards (Stanley & Patrick, 1998).

Training quality accreditation has two levels: the institution and program level. Vietnam initially conducted quality training accreditation in the universities. Today there are different accreditation agencies in the world as follows:

- State organizations such as: The Bureau of Higher Education Standards which belongs 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; Sweden; and the National Accreditation Agency (Holland)

- Association accreditation organizations such as: Association of Universities 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); 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 universities with the hope that quality management in education will improve.

References

- Luật Giáo dục Việt Nam(2005) (Education Law of Vietnam), Education Publisher
- Newby, P. (1999). Culture and Quality in Higher Education, *Higher Education Policy*, Vol. 12, Number. 3, pp.261-75
- Philosophy dictionary (1986). Progress Publisher.
- Sallis, (1993). TQM in Education, Sage Publication
- Seymour, D. T. (1993). On Causing Quality in Higher Education, Series on Higher Education, American council on Education.
- Stanley, E. C. and Patrick, W. J. (1998) Quality Assurance in American and British Higher Education: A Comparison. *New Directions for Institutional Research* 25, 3, 39-56.
- Vietnamese dictionary (1988). Education Publisher.
- Vietnamese Government (2001). Education Development Strategic Plan for 2001-2010. Chiến lược phát triển giáo dục 2001-2010, Ministry of Education and Training
- UNESCO (2001) Quality Assurance: World Higher Education Framework of Action, World Conference on Higher Education Framework of Action,
http://www.unesco.org/education/studyingabroad/what_is/quality_assurance_wche.shtml