

Current Status and Challenges, Solutions and Achievements of Vietnamese Higher Education on the Path to Integration

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ABSTRACT

"Education is the most powerful weapon one can use to change the whole world" or is "If any country wins the education race, it wins economic development" Those are statements that express the importance of education to the destiny of the country and the development of the nation. Change is inevitable, to truly innovate from training and fostering staff to innovating teaching methods, teach how to learn, learn and boldly innovate the work of testing and assessing the learning results of students, access to competencies is necessary and urgent.

In the past decades, Vietnam's vocational education system has had remarkable achievements and developments, making an important contribution to the task of raising people's knowledge and training human resources for the work of construction and preservation. protect and develop the country. Besides the great achievements mentioned above, vocational education in our country still contains many weaknesses and inadequacies, and there are many issues of great concern. A radical dissection revolution is needed to innovate and develop.

To solve the above problem, the article synthesizes achievements, challenges, opportunities and offers solutions for Vietnamese vocational education based on integration.

Key words: Vocational education, current state of education, challenges, solutions and integration.

1. Introduction

Implementing the Party's Resolution 29-NQ/TW on fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training, education and training have achieved notable achievements and development steps. However, it still exhibits many classic subjective and objective issues, revealing many systemic inadequacies. Education remains heavily achievement-oriented,

focusing more on quantity than quality. The content of the program is outdated, failing to promote creative thinking and practical skills for learners. Teaching quality is lax and declining, and teachers and facilities do not meet societal development expectations. The goal of reforming general education to create a solid foundation for changes in higher education must shift from equipping knowledge to developing learners' comprehensive capabilities.

Educational researchers and managers have scientifically analyzed and synthesized the issues in implementing reforms and proposed solutions for successful education and training reforms. Initially, managers and scientists have evaluated the status, causes, and remedial measures for education and training in the context of integration, studied shifts in awareness and implementation policies, examined implementation processes in a flat world, and identified barriers to adjust clear implementation methods to create consensus, cooperation, and high unity within the entire education system and society.

The famous American futurist Alvin Toffler stated, "A nation that does not educate its people will be eliminated, and an individual who is not educated will be rejected by his society." Educational reform is a matter of great social concern, especially developing higher education based on competency approaches, which is essential. Higher education reform must follow a modern direction, enhancing active, creative thinking, and knowledge application, focusing on teaching how to learn and think, encouraging self-study to update and innovate knowledge and skills, and developing independence and experiential capacity in line with the program development trends of advanced countries.

The research process to find optimal directions for education has yielded initial positive changes at both macro and micro levels within the entire system and society, and individual awareness of the necessity and practical actions required for educational reform.

However, the reform process must be implemented consistently from the top down, synchronously, with appropriate steps and priorities based on linking scientific research with practical experimentation, and adjusting to avoid significant errors that could affect the entire system.

2. Method

2.1. The Current State of Vietnamese Higher Education

Boyatzis and colleagues (1995) summarized the shortcomings from various studies that are systemic and represent the current state of higher education [1], [11], such as:

- Overemphasis on analysis without practical and action-oriented guidance.

- Weakness in developing interpersonal skills.
- A narrow, limited, and non-comprehensive approach in values and thinking.
- Failure to help learners work effectively in groups and teams.

In terms of objectives, we have not adequately emphasized that the goal of vocational education must be to define output standards.

Compared to some countries in the region and the world, our educational content, especially in higher education, is still outdated. The overall content and programs of various education levels in our country are mostly compiled or influenced by the programs of former allied countries. In the context of innovation and international integration, our higher education content reveals many inadequacies: (i) Firstly, academic knowledge is heavily theoretical with little practical application, lacking alignment between educational and employment objectives; (ii) Secondly, there is no connection between domestic and international higher education standards, making it difficult for learners to transfer schools or fields of study; (iii) Thirdly, the academic program is extensive, causing students to be under constant pressure to complete the curriculum, with little time for self-study, research, or participation in other social activities.

According to author Trần Khánh Đức (2015), teaching methods and organizational forms of higher education have not yet approached the advanced methods and forms of higher education in the world. The teaching methods do not focus on learner competency, overly rely on lectures, and invest heavily in memorization without emphasizing conceptual or analytical learning. Students are often passive and superficial in their learning [2][3].

The quality of higher education is still low, focusing more on quantity than quality, and not meeting the demands and expectations for national development. Higher education has not yet fulfilled its promise to deliver the expected quality of education, meeting only the goal of knowledge transmission without addressing character education or career orientation.

The role of education and training is to develop individuals to meet the urgent needs of a developing economy, necessitating a high-quality education system. Training should prioritize personality development, such as independence, responsibility, and teamwork, based on solid foundational education to facilitate transitions between training forms and focusing on developing social-occupational competencies closely related to the labor market, enhancing adaptability and self-learning [11], [12].

Government management in higher education has many limitations, being the main cause of other issues; the educational management mechanism is still bureaucratic, lacking flexibility and

responsibility from the grassroots units. Educational policies are incomplete, subjective, and detached from reality, lacking social consensus and struggling with macro-level awareness in the context of market economy and international integration, failing to meet national expectations.

Higher education content, programs, and teaching methods are outdated, slow to innovate, and not closely linked to social life and occupational demands, failing to promote students' creative thinking and practical capabilities. The evaluation of student learning outcomes remains heavily focused on rote memorization, lacking attention to the purpose of assessments and the development of learners' capabilities.

According to Nguyễn Công Khanh (2015), the assessment of student learning outcomes is still heavily focused on rote memorization and mechanical, monotonous, and trivial memory tests. Test designers do not consider the various levels of examination purposes: whether it is to test memory or to assess the level of understanding and application of knowledge by students, and what competencies are intended to be developed in learners. This is a consequence of the old, academic, scholastic teaching methods, where assessments predominantly focus on knowledge reproduction. [7], [8].

Nguyễn Hữu Lộc (2018) asserts that the evaluation process is still heavily influenced by the test designers' psychological biases and subjectivity, lacking reference to standard knowledge and skills benchmarks. The focus has not been on using assessments to aid student learning through testing, but rather on assigning grades to test results. In assessments, the emphasis has been on teachers evaluating students, with insufficient opportunities for students to assess each other or self-assess their learning outcomes.[6], [8].

There is confusion and a lack of clear principles in developing guidelines for international educational collaboration. The national education system is not aligned with developmental needs, lacks synchronization, is not interconnected, and is imbalanced.

Both qualitatively and quantitatively, the quality of scientific research in higher education remains low in terms of both quality and quantity and faces many inadequacies, despite the modest number of scientific staff, particularly PhDs, associate professors, and professors in higher education.

Nguyễn Xuân Lạc (2017) indicates that educational thinking is heavily influenced by psychological biases and perspectives that have not been thoroughly grasped or appropriately updated. Attitudes towards the socialization of education have not been fully and correctly understood, failing to keep up with core requirements for educational and training reforms aimed at national development in the context of a market economy and international integration. Technical teacher training schools, institutes, or faculties have not been adequately prioritized or

returned to their rightful role in technical education, despite the significant responsibilities borne by technical teacher training institutions.

The educational management staff and lecturers are insufficient and exhibit many shortcomings, with a portion lacking in ethics and competence. The current state of educators and educational managers reveals significant limitations in advisory work, forecasting, planning, working methods, financial management, foreign language and computer skills, information gathering, and processing capabilities.

The quality of higher education has been neglected and declined, especially in moral education and lifestyle, being weak in ideological education, national history, creative thinking, practical skills, life skills, lifestyle, and ethics.

The general quality of education, particularly in higher education, remains low, with outdated teaching methods that are slow to innovate. Conditions necessary for the development of higher education are still inadequate. Poor families, low-income families, and ethnic minorities face significant difficulties in accessing higher education, especially at advanced levels. Negative phenomena in higher education have been slow to be addressed.

The impact of the 4.0 industrial revolution on education is profound, necessitating changes in educational goals, content, methods, and organizational forms to meet 4.0 requirements. Lifelong learning and new skills need to be incorporated into higher education to adapt to 4.0 demands, emphasizing creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, team management, and teamwork skills.

Assessing the current state of education places education before the demands of the country in a new phase, approaching the subsequent research categories.

Rausch, Sherman, and Washbush (2001) argue that "carefully designed education and training programs focusing on competency-based outcomes can naturally address most, if not all, of these shortcomings" [4][14].

2.2. Achievements, Opportunities, and Challenges of Vietnamese Higher Education

From an overall perspective, despite subjective and objective conditions, there are notable positive aspects in higher education, which should not be overlooked. There are significant achievements that deserve recognition.

2.2.1. Achievements of Vietnamese Higher Education

Vietnamese education and training have made important contributions to the national development and defense effort.

Specifically, the system of schools and higher education institutions has expanded rapidly, meeting the learning needs of the people, implementing universal education, and improving the training level and professional skills of learners.

Strategic goals of enhancing public knowledge, training human resources, and nurturing talents have achieved significant results, contributing to the country's socio-economic development. The development direction is gradually shifting from knowledge enhancement to developing learners' qualities and competencies, with higher education quality gradually approaching global standards [13].

Social policies on higher education have been effectively implemented, and international cooperation has been strengthened, yielding significant results. The quality of higher education has improved both qualitatively and quantitatively, enhancing conditions for successful educational development.

The management of education has seen positive changes. The number of educators and education management staff has increased rapidly, with their training levels being improved to gradually meet the demands of modern educational development.

The infrastructure of the higher education system has developed and progressively modernized, creating a favorable teaching and learning environment as investment in education is enhanced. There is also an approach to teaching methods and competency-based assessment prioritizing practical skills and application, based on the serious attitude of learners. In education, developing independence, a sense of responsibility, and teamwork skills should be prioritized; broad and solid foundational training allows for transferability between training forms; aiming to develop social-professional competencies closely linked to the labor market; enhancing adaptability and self-learning capabilities [8], [9].

Social equity in education has made significant progress, especially for impoverished families, low-income households, ethnic minorities, rural laborers, policy beneficiaries, those with meritorious services, and people in difficult circumstances. Gender equality is fundamentally ensured, facilitating conditions for everyone to learn according to their appropriate age and level.

A viable, dynamic, efficient, and high-quality education system is one that meets the country's developmental needs in the new era and aligns with contemporary trends, representing an optimal education system.

2.2.2. Opportunities and Challenges of Vietnamese Higher Education

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Vietnam is not outside the global orbit and is directly impacted, creating both opportunities and challenges for higher education and the broader process of national industrialization and modernization.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution can disrupt traditional labor structures as automation and robotics replace manual labor across many sectors of the economy. The impact of this revolution on the social labor structure will change over different periods [9].

The distinguishing feature of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is its reliance not on machinery but on human capability and intellect, especially creative capacity. Thus, Vietnam can leverage its latecomer advantage, with a youthful demographic structure.

Another opportunity and challenge for higher education arise as the world advances into the Fourth Industrial Revolution, while Vietnam remains primarily in the second stage (Industrial Revolution 2.0), focused on processing and assembly lines.

Most Vietnamese laborers are not systematically trained, with limited theoretical knowledge and practical skills, particularly in specialized knowledge and foreign language proficiency necessary for social interaction. This poses a significant challenge for higher education as it enters the Fourth Industrial Revolution with an inadequately prepared workforce and limited high-tech infrastructure, fragmented and unsynchronized small-scale production, and a lack of cohesion.

The transformations in internet communication methods also present opportunities and challenges in the digital age, notably the dangers to human health, financial security, cybersecurity, and higher demands for personal information protection.

The core of higher education reform is training a high-quality workforce to meet the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

With rapid technological changes, education must equip learners with essential skills and knowledge, a serious and inquisitive attitude, creative thinking, and the ability to adapt to the continually evolving job requirements to avoid the risk of obsolescence and elimination. The survival of higher education depends on the acceptance of the evolutionary process that necessitates the replacement of traditional education methods with those that emphasize critical thinking, innovation, cultural understanding, and skills for self-learning and career establishment, utilizing modern information, mobile technology, smartphones, and cloud computing.

Given the global changes, while many countries have successfully sought educational development paths, Vietnam's education remains stagnant and outdated. The recent development

of higher education in Vietnam has led to imbalances in the scale across different disciplines and educational levels, creating acute contradictions between efficiency, quality, and training scale.

Public opinion criticizes the outdated teaching and learning methods in higher education, which remain heavily theoretical and academic with little emphasis on practical application.

The reality reveals that other countries do not solely rely on capital, technology, and natural resources but also on the creative and intellectual capabilities of their people through education.

Despite its limitations, Vietnam has significant human resource potential, with a youthful population capable of quickly adapting to information technology. Education and training will be the key to unlocking various opportunities for science and technology roles. This represents both an opportunity and a significant challenge for the education sector and higher education in particular.

2.2.3. Solutions for Vietnamese Higher Education

With the aspiration for an advanced education system rich in national identity, higher education reform based on international integration is necessary and consistent with global trends. The following are proposed solutions for higher education:

Overall management quality needs enhancing. It is essential to innovate management thinking and methods to improve capacity and efficiency. This includes rigorously implementing administrative reforms, institutionalizing the roles, functions, tasks, powers, and responsibilities of management.

There is a need to build an educational philosophy. Each university and educational institution should develop an educational philosophy appropriate to their mission, aiming for international integration and development.

Scientific research and international publications should be strengthened. Move towards internationalizing scientific evaluation standards and professional activities at higher education institutions. The state and educational institutions should create policies to encourage scientists to conduct research and publish their results internationally.

According to Bloom (1995), to address existing shortcomings, higher education must urgently research and apply educational philosophy and cognitive thinking innovations to meet contemporary demands. This includes changing educational perspectives and goals as guiding principles for higher education reform, from curricula and textbooks to teaching methods. This new philosophy will shift from learning to "remember" to learning to "understand" [1], [10].

Author Tran Khanh D. Duc (2020) is deeply aware that innovating educational thinking in the age of knowledge to meet the changes of life is inevitable. When the knowledge system changes, sooner or later, quickly or slowly, people's ability to think and operate must also change. The changing realities of life always pose new challenges and problems, forcing people to think, seek clear solutions, and build means to address those problems. New knowledge is created to supplement and enhance the existing knowledge system, changing perspectives and parts of the worldview, which leads to changes in how individuals and communities operate [2], [9].

It should be ensured that everyone has equal rights and obligations in learning, with equal opportunities. Education must respect individual differences, foster personal development, and create diverse paths and opportunities for learners to develop their talents, becoming national assets. Personality education is crucial, emphasizing creativity, self-learning, self-research, responsibility, and group participation, fostering higher-order thinking skills, and inspiring a passion for scientific research and self-learning to apply academic knowledge in a flat world.

Educational innovation needs to link with building a learning society; ensure quality conditions; standardize, modernize, democratize, socialize, and internationally integrate the education system. Strongly innovate curricula and teaching methods towards integration. Programs and textbooks should be organized flexibly, allowing for diverse teaching methods centered on the learner, reducing classroom hours to allow more self-learning and research time. Institutions should regularly conduct objective assessments to drive educational development.

Comprehensive and fundamental changes in evaluation should be implemented. For input evaluation, there should be the transition to assessment of understanding and creative content. For output evaluation, it should be the ability to apply learned knowledge and skills in real-world environments.

According to Nguyen Huu Loc (2018), it is crucial to improve educational management, especially quality management in training; establish teaching programs with outcome criteria. They should be written from the learner's perspective, clearly stating what they can achieve after completing a course, based on objective reality and societal demands [6], [9].

Curricula and teaching methods should be innovated: Towards regional and international integration, with curricula designed to be flexible and updated every 3-5 years. Transition teaching methods to center on the learner, making them the focus of the educational process. The learner's role is crucial, driving educational content design, scenario writing, objective setting, and teaching methods, ensuring that they take control of their learning and research processes.

Program content and teaching methods should be innovated towards regional and international integration. The content of the construction program is open, flexible and has a life cycle ranging from 3 to 5 years; innovate student-centered teaching methods.

All educational methods center around the teaching-learning process. However, in traditional educational methods, the role of the teacher is emphasized. Conversely, in modern educational methods, the role of the learner is particularly emphasized. The learner-centered approach is thoroughly implemented from the program design stage, content compilation, scenario writing, and objective formulation to the application of teaching methods.

The learner-centered teaching method places the learner in the appropriate trajectory of education, adhering to the laws of the educational process so that education can focus on and address the learner's needs. With their capabilities, passion, and individual conditions, learners will take charge of their own learning and research process.

It is necessary to innovate the orientation and development strategy of education, particularly higher education, in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the digital economy. The development of higher education must be closely linked to the needs of economic and social development. The educational process must shift from primarily imparting academic knowledge to comprehensively developing learners' competencies and qualities, combining theory with practice, and ensuring that learning involves practical experience..

3. Results

The gradual orientation towards building higher education that meets regional standards, advancing towards international standards, to gradually affirm Vietnam's position in education and training on the international stage, is absolutely essential. To successfully achieve this, a solid and appropriate roadmap is required.

Achieving quality standards in the educational workforce is the top priority. This workforce includes not only the management team and lecturers but also the students. Currently, Vietnam has no shortage of scientists, skilled managers, and experienced, dedicated lecturers. However, due to a lack of appropriate mechanisms and policies, favorable conditions for their dedication to the development of national education and training have not yet been fully established.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

We need comprehensive solutions, but we must also have breakthrough, focused, and determined decisions to achieve the chosen goals, thereby bringing about genuinely positive changes in the education and training sector.

Despite systemic issues such as the quality of education and teaching methods, higher education in Vietnam has affirmed itself in the revitalization process. New theoretical points, scientific arguments, and the application of the Fourth Industrial Revolution are placed in the right educational reference framework to serve as a lever for educational development. This is to educate for education's sake, and for the sake of humanity.

In summary, to achieve comprehensive educational goals and successfully implement educational reforms, changes in the perception and actions of each teacher and educational manager are crucial. Educational managers must possess certain qualities and competencies, particularly the ability to adapt to change and develop based on critical thinking and emotional intelligence.

With the current realities, achievements, challenges, opportunities, and solutions, higher education has risen to new heights, developed rapidly, and achieved notable accomplishments. It has firmly stepped on the path of comprehensive cooperation and international integration.

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