

CHALLENGES TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF VIETNAM IN THE TIME OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION¹

DESAFIOS À EDUCAÇÃO SUPERIOR DO VIETNÃ EM TEMPOS DE INTEGRAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL

Lai Quoc Khanh

Assoc. Professor, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National
University, Hanoi, Vietnam
khanhlq.nv@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Vietnam is a developing country. Over roughly 40 years of innovation, Vietnam has seen remarkable development achievements in all aspects of social life that carry significant historical meaning. However, Vietnam is still facing many challenges, especially from the sustainable development perspective. One of such significant challenges is the need for more high-quality human resources. While the demand for high-quality human resources for the labor market is increasing and has not been met, the percentage of students enrolling in universities and colleges in Vietnam is too low and gradually reducing. The article aims to highlight the prevailing challenges and solutions to such problems that Vietnamese higher education institutions are facing

Keywords: Higher education, Universities in Vietnam, situation of higher education, solutions to Vietnamese higher education.

RESUMO

O Vietnã é um país em desenvolvimento. Ao longo de cerca de 40 anos de Inovação, o Vietnã registou conquistas de desenvolvimento notáveis em todos os aspectos da vida social, com um significado histórico significativo. No entanto, o Vietnã ainda enfrenta muitos desafios, especialmente do ponto de vista do desenvolvimento sustentável. Um desses desafios significativos é a necessidade de mais recursos humanos de alta qualidade. Embora a procura de recursos humanos de elevada qualidade para o mercado de trabalho esteja a aumentar e não tenha sido satisfeita, a percentagem de estudantes matriculados em universidades e faculdades no Vietnã é demasiado baixa e está a diminuir gradualmente. O artigo tem como objetivo destacar os desafios e soluções prevaletentes para esses problemas que as instituições de ensino superior vietnamitas enfrentam

Palavras-chave: Ensino superior, Universidades no Vietnã, situação do ensino superior, soluções para o ensino superior vietnamita.

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Introduction

Vietnam is a developing country. Over roughly 40 years of innovation, Vietnam has seen remarkable development achievements in all aspects of social life that carry significant historical meaning. Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, noted that “Based on our remarkable achievements, we can affirm that our country has never had the fortune, potential, position, and prestige as it is today” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021,p.322).

In terms of the economic aspect, for example, in the context of many complex challenges of the world economy and inflation deemed as the top concern of many economies, the signs of global economic recession are increasingly prominent. In contrast, Vietnam's economic growth in 2022 has reached 8.02% (Ngoc, p.2022), a breakthrough many countries with more potential than Vietnam dream of.

Access to tertiary education in Vietnam is a very competitive endeavor. In Vietnam, the generally accepted perception is that success in one's career is pegged on the kind of university one enrolls in. Moreover, the higher education sphere has to deal with the fact that post-graduate programmes and the number of scientific publications is still quite low. In addition, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, Vietnam's tertiary institutions had to transform rapidly to deal with the challenges arising from the pandemic. For example, tertiary institutions had to adapt very quickly and embrace online classes and exams during the 2020-2021 COVID-19 lockdown period (Nguyen, 2022).

On October 12, 2022, Times Higher Education (THE), a world university ranking organization, announced the World University Rankings 2023 (THE WUR, 2023). Based on the ranking, 6 higher education institutions in Vietnam have been mentioned in THE WUR 2023. The rankings indicate that the integration of Vietnamese higher education with world higher education is gradually developing and significantly increasing (Van & An, 2023).

On the contrary, Vietnam is still facing many challenges, especially from the sustainable development perspective. One of such significant challenges is the need for more high-quality human resources. The *10-year socio-economic development*

strategy 2021-2030 of the Communist Party of Vietnam clearly states: “The quality of human resources, especially high-quality ones, has not satisfied the requirements” (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper, 2021b). While the demand for high-quality human resources for the labor market is increasing and has not been met, the percentage of students enrolling in universities and colleges in Vietnam is too low and gradually reducing. According to the August 2022 report of the World Bank (WB), the enrollment percentage of Vietnamese students in universities and colleges in 2019 was 28.6%. This percentage is relatively low compared to other ASEAN countries and only half that of upper-middle-income countries (55.1%) (Hang, 2022b).

Method

The article is based on a library-based study and analysis of existing data in the field. The author has analyzed data from existing publications to come up with the article.

Long-lasting Challenges of higher education in Vietnam

The Vietnamese Party and State attach great importance to education and training. In the early stage of Innovation, the viewpoint “Education and training is the leading national policy” was presented for the first time in Resolution No. 04-NQ/TW dated January 14, 1993, of the Communist Party of Vietnam on continuing to innovate education and training, and has always been affirmed. Under the efforts made by the leaders of the country and the whole society, education and training, in general, and higher education in particular, have made remarkable developments. Based on statistics released by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2021, the total number of universities has increased from 2015-2020, from 223 in the school year 2015-2016 to 237 universities in 2019-2020. The numbers and international rankings of several Vietnamese higher education institutions have also significantly improved recently.

As stated in the 2019 rankings of Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the world-leading prestigious university ranking organization based in the UK, Vietnam has the first two representatives, including Vietnam National University, Hanoi, and Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City. By 2023, the rankings placed five Vietnamese universities,

including Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam National University, Hanoi and Duy Tan University, within position 801-1000, Ton Duc Thang University ranked 1001-1200, and Hanoi University of Science and Technology ranked 1201-1400.

Furthermore, most recently, on June 1, 2023, THE announced THE Impact Rankings 2023, which has referred to the Vietnamese higher education institutions such as Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Hanoi University of Science and Technology, Ton Duc Thang University, Phenikaa University, Duy Tan University, FPT University, National Economics University, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City and Ho Chi Minh City Open University (VNU Media, 2023).

Nonetheless, experts hold the view that Vietnamese higher education is lagging behind its comparators in Southeast Asia and is facing lots of challenges, of which the following are major ones:

Firstly, the quality of education and training still needs to be improved, as well as the human resources requirements for national socio-economic development, and cohesion with the labor market needs to be ensured.

The number of higher education institutions is currently increasing. According to Nguyen (2023a), in 2020, there were 176 and 66 public and private universities in Vietnam, respectively. Further, Nguyen (2023b) reports that in 2020, approximately 1.9 million students were enrolled in tertiary institutions in Vietnam. In the same year, Vietnam recorded approximately 242,400 new university graduates (Nguyen, 2023c).

However, quality education is generally not guaranteed because of the pursuit of appearance perfection and vainglory or false advertising of school brands, misleading learners and students. Some institutions have degraded infrastructure and need more equipment, premises, or space for study, research, and teaching. Thus, they must rent or borrow them in many locations and facilities. As required by the planning, the others are required to move out of the inner city, but they have delayed, causing confusion and anxiety among their lecturers and students. Some universities were built on a large scale, licensed to teach and enroll students. However, due to the limited vision or market assessment of students' needs and

organizational apparatus and structure, they could not enroll and were abandoned, which is a tremendous waste. Furthermore, the rapid establishment of higher education institutions, upgrading and conversion of colleges to universities, school name changing, training field expansion, and enrollment increase without education quality improvement have eroded their prestige, image, sympathy, and trust of society.

Education and training are not associated with the practical needs and requirements of society, resulting in the wastage of human resources, finance, and time and a slowdown in the development of society, and simultaneously creating more social problems when various graduates have no jobs or get jobs but need to be trained further. In 2020, Vietnam had 225,000 bachelors, engineers, and masters who could not find jobs or accepted jobs different from their majors. The General Statistics Office states that the number of people with Associate's or Bachelor's degrees or higher, among 1.2 million unemployed, accounts for 30.8%, nearly 369,600 people (Communist Party of Vietnam Online Newspaper 2022).

The survey was undertaken at 60 businesses and companies engaging in industrial services in Ho Chi Minh City concerning the "Assessment of satisfaction of businesses and companies with the quality of graduates in the first year after graduation" (the set of criteria for such assessment consists of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, foreign language proficiency, working style, and professional skills), only 5% of survey participants were assessed very good, 15% good, 30% average and 40% unsatisfactory (Tuyet 2022).

The inability to secure employment after graduation is one reason why many high school students choose vocational training, study abroad, and labor export or freelance jobs instead of undergraduate education. Therefore, the number of students studying abroad has increased significantly. As reported by the statistics of the International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Education and Training, about 190,000 Vietnamese students are studying and researching abroad. The countries with the highest number of Vietnamese students are Australia, the USA, Canada, the UK, and China, with 30,000, 29,000, 21,000, 12,000, and 11,000

students, respectively (Hop, 2023), which shows an unambiguous signal of increasing unattractiveness of higher education in our country.

Because of the reduction in enrollment or financial autonomy, many universities have lowered their admission standards, adopted various admission methods, and even invited students. However, they still need to meet the number of required students. The target of quantity, lowering admission standards, and lecturers' psychological insecurity pose the risk of decreasing educational quality. In addition, the university entrance exam was deemed to have a high-stakes competition, so success in such an exam would be a great honor. On the contrary, because of the policies mentioned above, joining universities is not exciting and attractive to students anymore because if they cannot enter top universities, they can enter lower-quality ones. It reduces learning motivation and may be more severe if the students join universities without motivation. Moreover, graduates will get paid too low in the future.

Secondly, despite recent developments, the quality and quantity of university lecturers still need to be high; the environment and working conditions in many universities cannot promote the capacity of lecturers, making it challenging to attract and retain qualified lecturers. According to Nguyen (2023d), in 2020, there were about 76.6 thousand university lectures in Vietnamese universities. The same data is affirmed by another report that concurs that as of 2020, the number of lecturers in Vietnamese universities reached 76,600 (The Statistical Yearbook, September 2021), of which the number of lecturers with doctoral degrees and title of professor or associate professor is 21,977 (accounting for 28.7%) and 4,865 (accounting for 6.3%) respectively. These percentages are low compared to the general situation of higher education in the country and the world. Specifically, the "student/lecturer ratio is approximately 26/1 while, in the countries with advanced higher education, this ratio is 15-20/1. Harvard University, in particular, has a student/faculty ratio of 23/2" (Chung, 2016p.85). This fact requires the continuous improvement of lecturers' qualifications, especially essential and leading lecturers and managers of some teacher training institutions. In addition, on the journey of international integration, the quantity and quality of work appearing in

international scientific publications have become a significant measure of the quality of higher education in countries. However, it is shown in reality that the number of international publications of universities in Vietnam is still inferior to many countries in the region. The impact index of scientific research work in Vietnam is also lower than in some countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The number of patents per 1 million people, some of which are held by higher education institutions, also measures the quality of university lecturers. That number is still too low in Vietnam (Hang, 2022a).

One of the significant challenges of higher education is the poor working environment and conditions. Many inflexible regulations and bureaucracy prevent lecturers from achieving the full potential of their talents and dedication to research and teaching. The salary, allowances, and preferential policies for talented young lecturers with excellent prospects in teaching and scientific research need to be revised. There are many problems in the policies of attracting, retaining, treating, and availing suitable jobs for young, competent, and qualified lecturers who have been educated and trained abroad. It causes job dissatisfaction and movement from public to private universities or other fields, causing confusion and brain drain. Following the report in 2022, “the whole country has 16,000 teachers leaving their jobs. In other words, one out of 100 teachers leaves the job on average” (Hai, 2022). The Rector of Tay Nguyen University pointed out:

It is not easy to recruit a doctorate to be a lecturer at a university, especially in the healthcare sector. For example, after being facilitated by the university to study abroad for a doctorate, a lecturer left the job and found a better opportunity at a city university with pay of hundreds of millions of Vietnamese dong per month. The extra income of the university depends on the admissions situation. The smaller the admission number of such a university is, the lower the lecturers’ income is. Low income creates more difficulties in professor and doctorate recruitment. This problem remains unsolved over time (Quyen 2022).

Thirdly, financial resources for higher education development are minimal and must meet the requirements.

Regarding budget, although education and training are considered leading national policies, the investment in education and training in general and higher education, in particular, is minimal. In the Workshop organized by the Committee for Culture, Education, Youth, Adolescents and Children in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Training and several higher education institutions on November 27, 2020, the representative of the World Bank pointed out that Vietnam allocates more than 5% of GDP in public resources to education, however, of which the investment in higher education is currently meager, accounting for only 0.33% (out of a total of 6.1% of government investment in education and training). Meanwhile, this rate is much higher in other countries (Hung and Linh, 2020).

The official figures of the Ministry of Finance have revealed that, in 2020, the planned budget for higher education is less than VND 17,000 billion. However, the actual expenditure is less than VND 12,000 billion. Based on such actual expenditure, the ratio of expenditure on higher education to GDP is 0.18%, much lower than that of countries in the region and the world (Hien, 2022). In recent times, at the National Scientific Conference organized by the Association of Vietnam Universities and Colleges in collaboration with Can Tho University on May 12, 2023, it was indicated by the data of the Ministry of Finance that the total State budget for education usually is 5-6% of GDP, but the one for higher education accounts for only 0.27% of GDP (Minh, 2023).

The allocation of the State budget to higher education institutions is based on budget limit and input factors only (quantity or number of students; number of staff; history of State budget allocation in previous years, etc.) without considering the quality and output results or policies on bidding or ordering public service rendering. Different governing bodies carry out the allocation; thus, it is inconsistent across relevant criteria and does not bring equity for beneficiaries. With such a budget, it is difficult for higher education institutions in Vietnam to make breakthroughs in improving their training and scientific research quality.

Regarding university autonomy, it is a significant policy of the Vietnamese Party, and the State is institutionalized into perfect regulations and guidelines. The perception of the stakeholders about university autonomy has also had many

positive changes. Many higher education institutions pioneering university autonomy have obtained impressive achievements, which has provided motivation and confidence for this policy to spread widely. In 2014, when the Government issued Decree No. 77/NQ-CP dated October 24, 2014, “on the pilot renovation of the operation mechanism of public tertiary education institutions during 2014-2017”, only four universities, including National Economics University, the University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Foreign Trade University and Hanoi University, applied this Decree, and, by the end of 2022, 154/170 public higher education institutions have set up their school councils starting operating, accounting for 90.6%, of which 36/36 public higher education institutions under the control of the Ministry of Education and Training have established school councils. The rate of universities under ministries, branches, and local governments establishing school councils reached 91.18%; 142/232 universities are eligible for autonomy in line with Law No. 34/2018/QH14; 32.7% of universities can afford recurrent and investment expenses; 13.7% of schools guarantee recurrent expenditure. The total revenue of autonomous higher education institutions increased noticeably. The average income of lecturers and administrators increased by 20.8% and 18.7%, respectively (Ha and Sang, 2022). Conversely, many problems have occurred, such as the limited awareness of society, authorities, and higher education institutions on university autonomy; unclear division of roles and responsibilities of party committees, school councils, and administrators in institutions, causing coincidental functions and duties, and even conflicts in some places. These have slowed down progress and limited the effectiveness of university autonomy, resulting in unsatisfactory mobilization of social resources for higher education development.

Moreover, the financial autonomy in Vietnam has given rise to the challenge that, without synchronous solutions, will limit many students' opportunities to access higher education under challenging circumstances. Furthermore, the institutions will encourage the disciplines or majors that are easy to enroll in, causing an unbalanced human resources system for the national development strategy.

Regarding the relationship between higher education institutions and companies, it is a critical channel that can help higher education institutions get many resources for their development, including financial resources. Despite initial positive changes, this relationship still needs improvement in Vietnam. In the Report issued at the First Session of the Committee on Education and Human Resources Development under the National Council on Sustainable Development and Competitiveness Enhancement held on the morning of August 18, 2022, lots of relevant data related to such relationship has been announced by the Ministry of Education and Training: The reports of nearly 50% of higher education institutions (June 2021) point out that up to 93,3% of universities remain the cooperation with companies; For the companies, 6,126 companies are in cooperation with 135 higher education institutions, reaching an average rate of 60 companies/institutions. Those figures seem impressive! Nonetheless, the Ministry of Education and Training also pointed out that such cooperation focuses on dispatching students to companies for internships, companies scholarships to students, organization job fairs, and recruitment of new graduates; offering bits of advice to training programs, participation in teaching (Education Communication Center 2022). Hence, the quality and effectiveness of cooperation between higher education institutions and companies could be better. The institutions have not attracted many resources, especially financial resources, from companies for their development, and companies have yet to consider such institutions as a source of high-quality human resources.

The quality and effectiveness of education and training do not match the socio-economic development requirements of the country without cohesion with the labor market. Currently, many new universities provide only what they have but not what society needs. That is one of the reasons why, in 2020, 225,000 bachelors, engineers, and masters in Vietnam could not find a job or were accepted to take jobs different from their majors, causing severe wastage. As shown by the survey conducted at 60 companies engaging in industrial services in Ho Chi Minh City on “Assessment of satisfaction of businesses and companies with the quality of graduates in the first year after graduation (the set of criteria for such assessment

consists of theoretical knowledge, practical skills, foreign language proficiency, working style, and professional skills), only 5% of survey participants were assessed very good, 15% good, 30% average and 40% unsatisfactory.

Fourthly, Vietnamese higher education is relatively “closed” and has not yet created domestic and international connections.

In the country, despite the general management of the Ministry of Education and Training, the ability to communicate knowledge between higher education institutions is limited. The recognition of credits and student exchange between domestic higher education institutions is limited, so students need help in multi-university and inter-university study, and it is difficult for institutions to link and use shared resources, including high-quality lecturers.

The universities in Vietnam, usually under the specialized university system, such as the University of Water Resources, University of Medicine, University of Pharmacy, University of Economics and Finance, University of Foreign Trade, etc., have started multidisciplinary teaching but, fundamentally, are specialized universities. Their programs “focus on” theory, “disregard” in practice, and knowledge application.

Vietnamese higher education is relatively “closed” and has not yet created a connection between domestic and international higher education standards. In the country, despite the general management of the Ministry of Education and Training, the ability to communicate knowledge between higher education institutions is limited. Universities and majors rarely recognize each other’s training results, so students will have difficulties transferring universities or majors. Knowledge communication between domestic and foreign higher education institutions is even more difficult due to the differences in teaching objectives, curricula, and methods (except agreed-upon international programs).

It is even more challenging to communicate knowledge between domestic and foreign higher education institutions because of differences in teaching objectives, curriculums, and methods (except agreed international programs) and others. Many countries worldwide have yet to recognize higher education diplomas conferred by Vietnam, which requires many domestic students wishing to study in

advanced foreign programs to start over from scratch. As a result, the attractiveness of domestic higher education institutions will decrease. At the same time, the improvement of education and training quality associated with international cooperation of Vietnamese institutions will also be limited.

Current Challenges of higher education in the time of international integration in Vietnam

International standards, such as in terms of university rankings, may cause universities in Vietnam to “lose themselves” or lose their identity during international integration.

Vietnamese universities have been forming partnerships with foreign firms in a bid to roll out globally competitive programmes. The government has been supportive of this approach while prioritizing reforming the universities, creating a highly qualified human resource, and infrastructural improvement (International Trade Administration, 2024). While these developments are good and well-meaning, in the long run, they might lead to their 'Vietnamese Identity' in their pursuit of an international global look.

In order number #55, 'Policy Framework and Strategies on the Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education' Philippines Commission Higher Education (CHED), the main purpose of internationalization was to "*improve the quality of education that would translate into the development of a competitive human resource capital that can adapt to shifting demands in the regional and global environment, to support and sustain the country's economic growth*" (Madula, 2018).

A university's identity goes beyond the fancy buildings or even the logo. As Madula (2018) noted, in the case of the Philippines, in a study that involved one private university and one public university, there were different views on the concept of internationalization. The private university had adopted the policy of internationalization seamlessly. However, in the case of the public university, there was a section of faculty and academics who were resisting the policy of internationalization because they feared that the university would lose the identity it had

developed over a long time as a powerhouse for nationalism and activism in the Philippines. There were misgivings about the concept of internationalization, with a prevalent fear that it would bring in Western education and a neo-liberal agenda leading to the university's loss of identity.

On-site training competitions are when foreign universities are established in Vietnam and attract high-quality lecturers and learners.

Che (2023) says that there is no universally accepted definition for transnational education but also proceeds to cite the Council of Europe (2002) which says that transnational education is any form of education where the learners are based in a country different from the awarding institution. Another perspective argues that *"Transnational higher education involves providers and programs crossing national borders"* (Wilkins, 2018, p.5). Integration of local universities with international partners also makes them attractive workplaces for faculty. For example, Che (2023) posits that in China, the partnership between Xi'an Jiaotong University and the University of Liverpool to create Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) has a lot of benefits for the faculty. The partnership that led to the creation of XJTLU allows them to enroll in lucrative internationally recognised professional development programmes such as the 'Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education (PGCert)' awarded by the University of Liverpool. This not only improves their ability to deliver in the workplace but also offers a path for career growth. Therefore, it can be rightly argued that faculty would rather work in such a higher institution than in local universities.

Retaining quality faculty poses a challenge to local Vietnamese universities whose working conditions are mostly inferior to the international universities. As a result, local universities have a continuous problem of losing their best faculty to the international universities in Vietnam because the international universities offer a superior work environment. One of the problems is the workload per lecturer compared to other parts of the world. In Vietnam, "the student/lecturer ratio is approximately 26/1 while, in the countries with advanced higher education, this

ratio is 15-20/1. Harvard University, in particular, has a student/faculty ratio of 23/2" (Chung, 2016, p.85). This population could easily mean that lecturers spend a lot of time on students, a time that they could use in research and generating knowledge.

Moreover, there is the aspect of salaries. The salaries that Vietnamese local universities pay their lecturers are remarkably lower than what they would be paid in international universities. Hence, granted the opportunity, a lecturer would rather work for an international university.

Vietnamese lecturers are under pressure from foreign lecturers who are invited to teach at universities in Vietnam

Hoque *et al.* (2018) note that in an attempt to improve international rankings and attain the coveted top 100 universities globally, Malaysian universities have adopted a policy of recruiting more foreign faculty. For example, the University of Malaya recruited a very high number of foreign faculty which sparked a lot of debate regarding the place of local talent. Although the argument was that the foreign faculty would contribute greatly to "publication in ISI (Web of Science) journals and increasing the index citation, the fact remains that the same could be achieved with well-trained local faculty.

In a bid to give a global experience in higher education, some universities have made deliberate efforts to recruit foreign faculty and researchers. Nguyen and Mai (2023) reported that Ton Duc Thang University (TDTU) in Ho Chi Minh City had recruited a vast majority of its faculty and researchers from Western countries. TDTU was granted autonomy by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) on 29/01/2015 as per Government Decree 128/QD-TTg. Although it is a relatively new university (Launched in 1997 and has collaborated with 137 international universities) and has much fewer foreign exchange students compared to other major universities like Vietnam National University it has the highest number of foreign faculty in the country. This is an example of a university actively recruiting foreign staff working towards its goal of offering 'international education.' These

policies mean that locally trained Vietnamese faculty might be edged out in favour of foreign faculty.

Attracting learners going abroad with advantages of prestige, scholarship, post-graduation employment

It is a glaring reality that some graduates from Vietnamese universities face challenges securing jobs after graduation because some businesses or companies are dissatisfied with the quality of their training and work readiness. According to Ng, Teng, and Yang (2022) when graduates are work-ready their employability is high. Therefore, universities must keep reviewing their programmes so that their graduates meet the demands of the ever-evolving workplace. The establishment of the notion that graduates from Vietnamese universities face challenges in securing jobs has made some universities fall out of favour among students. Many high school graduates prefer studying abroad to Vietnam. According to data from the Ministry of Education's Department of International Cooperation, there were about 190,000 Vietnamese students either studying or conducting their research abroad in the 2019-2020 academic year. Five countries represent the top study destinations for Vietnamese students. The number of students in each of the three countries is Australia- 30,000; The USA-29,000; Canada-21,000; The UK-12,000; and China-11,000 (Hop, 2023)

In addition, according to the Open Doors report released on 13 November 2023 by the American Institute of International Education (IIE), 21,900 Vietnamese students were studying in the U.S. The said students had been enrolled in higher education, 65.3% being undergraduate students, 17.2% being post-graduate students, 15% being Optional Practical Training (OPT) students, and 2.6% having enrolled for non-degree programs. It is informative to note that Vietnam continues to make great strides in the growth of the manufacturing and services sectors. Also, there is still a need for more qualified human resources with the appropriate skills in management, science, and technology. Cognisant of the importance of a more practical education that many Vietnamese universities do not offer, some Vietnamese students have gone to universities outside the country in pursuit of the

same because foreign-educated students tend to have better chances of getting well-paying jobs (International Trade Administration, 2024)

The other reason Vietnamese students might prefer a foreign university to a local one is the notion that the quality of education in local universities has dropped. In recent years, perhaps due to dropping enrollment or reduced financial autonomy, many universities have lowered their admission requirements, while some have even adopted the approach of inviting students. Many students then have the fear that if they are trained in a 'poor quality education system,' then it would affect their job prospects negatively. As a result, the students who can afford it then join foreign universities.

The same challenge of student mobility is developing in Laos, fueled mostly by the graduate employability factor. According to Sisavath (2021), a study conducted in Laos established that students who had studied abroad had more chances of securing a job in their home country compared to those who had studied in Laos. The study concluded that studying abroad enhanced communication skills (Sisavath, 2021).

Recommendations

Vietnam, while embracing and encouraging the policy of internalization of higher education, must also encourage universities to retain their identity. While the pursuit of the coveted top 100 ranking in the world is good, it should go in tandem with the vision and mission of the university. Just like the case in the cited university in the Philippines, the faculty should be keen to retain positive values like nationalism and identity.

The establishment of international universities in a country, in many cases, leads to competition for learners and faculty. Learners and faculty tend to opt for private universities because of the learning environment. This is seen in China's XJTLU experience, which attracts highly qualified faculty because of the work environment and prospects for career growth. Vietnam should encourage universities to adopt policies that attract highly qualified faculty and give them

incentives (e.g., lower student-lecturer ratio, more time for research and research grants) that would make them wish to keep working for them.

Vietnam-based lecturers also facing competition from expatriates. While pushing towards offering international higher education, more publications in highly regarded journals, and the top 100 in the global university rankings, many international universities based in Vietnam tend to go for foreign lecturers. The same challenge has also been witnessed in Malaysia. Vietnamese universities could improve the quality of their faculty by giving them grants or sponsoring them to acquire more relevant qualifications from outside the country.

There has been a challenge for many Vietnamese students enrolling in foreign universities because of the aspect of job prospects after graduation. This challenge has also been noted in Laos. Universities can work on improving the quality of education offered to encourage more quality learners to enrol. One way of doing this is getting into partnerships with more international universities to give learners an ‘international education experience.’ The universities should also make sure their programmes are in line with the market demands in terms of the skills imparted to the learners to increase ‘employability.’ Also, they can try working with specific employers and develop partnerships for job placement after graduation to encourage more students to enrol in their programmes.

Conclusions

“Teaching is to teach how to learn, inspire, discuss, and solve problems. Learning is to learn how to learn, the spirit of self-study, debate, criticism, and lifelong learning. Assessment of learning outcomes must focus on assessing learning capacity, learning ability, objective review of the whole process, not just testing obtained knowledge” (Anh and Thuong 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to concentrate on adjusting and standardizing curriculums, output standards, training quality and effectiveness, scientific research, etc.

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