



## HIGHER EDUCATION AND IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HUMAN RESOURCES TODAY

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### **Abstract:**

Today, higher education is developing in a context of lots of changes and challenges. First, the fourth industrial revolution is having a huge impact on changing the operating model of higher education and higher education governance. Second, changes in the labor market and economic structure require workers to have lots of knowledge and skills to keep up with practical issues caused by social changes. Third, enterprises today are more and more interested in education and are heavily investing in this field. They also have higher and higher standards for human resources to meet business demands. Fourth, universities are increasingly being invested in to strengthen their competitiveness as well as to level up in international rankings. Fifth, Vietnamese education is also under pressure to compete with regional and Asian schools. So is the cross-border labor market, which also affects Vietnamese labor market and human resources.

**JEL:** I20; I23; J24; O15

**Keywords:** education, higher education, human resources

### **1. Introduction**

Over 30 years of renovation, higher education in Vietnam has had important achievements. The system of legal normative documents on higher education is gradually being improved to become a legal corridor for higher education to develop, in accordance with guidelines and orientations of the Party. Especially, many new policies have been planned and implemented, such as promoting the autonomy of higher education institutions. As of December 31, 2020, there are 149 higher education institutions and 9 pedagogy colleges that meet Vietnamese standards for higher education quality, accounting for about 55% of all universities and academies across the country. There are 7 universities recognized by international accreditation organizations;

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145 training programs of 43 universities accredited according to domestic standards; and 195 programs of 32 universities accredited according to regional and international standards. In addition to accreditation, over the years, Ministry of Education and Training as well as universities in Vietnam also attach special importance to the ranking of universities. In 2018, for the first time in the history of Vietnamese higher education, two national universities were listed in top 1,000 universities around the world, according to QS World University Rankings. To date, Vietnam has had 4 universities in the top 1,000 in the world; 11 in QS Asian rankings; many fields of training in the world's top 500, etc... Those are results of the breakthrough of higher education in Vietnam.

In the past 20 years, with the orientation of "*Education and training together with science and technology as the leading national policy*", "*considering investment in education as one of the main directions of development investment to create conditions for education to advance and effectively serve socioeconomic development*"<sup>ii</sup>, higher education has had certain achievements, and provided the country with millions of people with associate or bachelor's degree as well as tens of thousands of workers with master's and doctoral degree. This is the key force and the core in building and developing our country. However, in order to accelerate the process of industrialization and modernization of the country in the period of renovation and international integration, the quality of higher education in Vietnam still has many issues to discuss.

First of all, let's talk about the philosophy of education. Simply put, philosophy of education is the system of perspectives that govern, lead and create the foundation for practical educational activities, which is first and foremost the view on the missions and objectives of education. Each country needs to define its own philosophy of education and amend and supplement such philosophy depending on the situation and tasks of each stage. However, in general, education philosophy must aim to produce talented people with good awareness of citizen responsibilities to serve the country. UNESCO has introduced a system of education philosophy consisting of the following points: 1. Education is the key to solve problems of social life. 2. Learn, continue to learn, and learn throughout life. 3. There are 4 pillars of education: Learning to know; learning to do; learning to live together; learning to be<sup>iii</sup>. So, what is the education philosophy of our country in the current context of industrialization, modernization and international integration? There have been many different opinions from scholars and researchers; however, a unified agreement is yet to be reached to clearly define the basic goals to be achieved of education, especially higher education. This inevitably leads to unwanted results.

Many people are complaining about the quality of higher education in Vietnam. They said that there are a lot of bachelors, masters and doctors, but their competence is questionable. Some years ago, only postgraduate training was criticized, but in recent years, even undergraduate training is considered "alarming". Therefore, although the doors of universities are always open, every year, many fail to fulfill their admission

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<sup>ii</sup> Resolution No. 04-NQ/TW of the 4th meeting of the Party's Central Executive Committee (session VII)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.qdnd.vn/van-hoa-giao-duc/giao-duc/viet-nam-can-co-mot-triet-ly-giao-duc-moi-556026>

target, while good students rush to study abroad. This situation exists because our higher education still has many weaknesses and is not confident to equip students with good knowledge and meet requirements of the labor market in the current context.

First and foremost, the curriculum in universities must be subject to a standard framework approved by Ministry of Education and Training. That is absolutely not wrong; however, it spreads out too much: everything is learned, but in a superficial way and not associated with reality. In fact, students must study very hard for their exams, but they don't know how the knowledge they learn will be applied later and tend to forget everything once they passed the tests. Some students cannot remember even the basic knowledge. The contents of curriculum are often not updated with knowledge of the world, and many are outdated for up to 30-40 years. So how can our students be able to integrate and compete intellectually in the world once they graduate? Not to mention, training programs still follow the path of many years ago, meaning they are more theory-heavy, less practical and not associated with the needs of the labor market, so students can hardly do the job right after graduating. This is a huge waste of money and time of not only the society and families, but also students themselves, because they are wasting their prime age for the good-for-nothing knowledge instead of absorbing more useful one.

As for textbooks, everyone understands that textbooks play a crucial role in teaching and expanding knowledge of students. In Western universities, textbooks are carefully researched and compiled, with annual updates; and their libraries are a huge repository of knowledge that students can use anytime. However, in our country, textbooks are mainly self-compiled. It is worth noting that some books have very simple contents which are outdated or even wrong. Domestic universities all have their own library, but the number of books, especially reference ones, is not many. Some libraries are foreign-aided, but all they have are old books. The shortage and obsolescence of both textbooks and reference books lead to the fact that students are lacking scientific knowledge in terms of both quantity and quality compared to the general level in the region and the world.

Teaching methods in our universities are still mainly "monologue" and "passive learning". It means that teachers teach and students note the lessons down, and then follow textbooks like a machine. When a test is coming, students must memorize the knowledge they learned without knowing what use it will have in their future career, and thus their learning process is often for passing the tests. Many teachers also design the tests like a puzzle to "trick" students rather than to properly and adequately assess students' knowledge. This method of teaching and assessment has followed students from primary education to secondary and tertiary ones. This method makes students excel in learning by heart, but also creates passive people who are lazy to think and unable to develop imaginary thinking, creativity, initiative, independence and practical skills. These are the consequences of our traditional way of education, partly due to the cultural norms of Confucian society, where teachers are respected while students are considered discourteous and rude to question their teachers. Many teachers themselves also do not encourage their students to ask questions, so knowledge is almost crammed

into student's head. That is totally opposite to the trend of education in the world today, where the interactions between teachers and students as well as between students and students are especially encouraged to better understand the existing weaknesses of each student and for them to develop independent thinking, communication and cooperation skills - which are extremely important factors for their future career.

One thing that is worth mentioning when it comes to training high-quality human resources is educating students of ethics and sense of citizenship. High-quality human resources consist of people who not only are "talented" in their fields, but also "morally good", as President Ho Chi Minh once said. If a talented person has no sense of citizenship and responsibilities at work, always considers their interests first, or lacks professional conscience, cooperative attitude, honesty, etc., then that person, no matter what field he works in or which position he holds, cannot truly devote himself to the organization and the country. As our country is boosting industrialization, modernization and international integration, the standard for moral qualities and responsibilities of each citizen is getting higher, as the market economy will have many negative impacts on and shake the belief of each person. However, it seems that higher education in our country is disregarding this issue. Universities mainly focus on conveying knowledge as stipulated by Ministry of Education and Training, and by doing that, teachers are considered to have completed their tasks.

## **2. Solutions**

The 11<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress pointed out the need for fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education. For higher education, renovation to improve its quality is all the more necessary and urgent, as the country is accelerating the cause of industrialization, modernization and international integration. This requires us to clearly define our objectives and have a high determination (not only in the education sector but also the political will of leaders from central to local level to create consensus and efforts). Continuing to implement the policy of fundamental and comprehensive renovation in education and training set out in Resolution of the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee (NQ 29-NQ/TW), the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress proposed the following directions: Education is the top national policy. Education and training must be developed to improve people's intellect, train human resources and foster talents. Strongly transiting education from mainly equipping learners with knowledge to comprehensively developing capabilities and qualities of learners; developing education and training in association with the needs for socioeconomic development, construction and defense of the Fatherland, science and technology advances; striving in years to come to create fundamental and strong changes in terms of quality and efficiency of education and training, so that by 2030, Vietnam's education reaches advanced level in the region.

First, renovating higher education must be carried out from admission to training, in order to offer valuable products to the labor market. In recent years, the number of universities in Vietnam has increased rapidly. It seems that universities just spring up like mushrooms without paying attention to whether they are able to teach well

(including the number of qualified lecturers, facilities, etc.). Quality of admission has also become a serious problem that has been warned by the media. With such a way to attract students, and that training is still limited (as presented above), it is inevitable that there cannot be high-quality human resources, especially in the context of fierce intellectual competition today. In particular, it is recommended to review universities and only those with sufficient capacity in all aspects are allowed to carry out the training. The number of universities should be reduced by introducing a set of criteria for what needs to be achieved. Every year, Ministry of Education and Training should announce the rankings of universities based on different criteria. Regarding admission, schools must use the same set of entrance exams, the minimum score for admission must also be relatively high, so that there will not be an inconsistency between students of schools in terms of entrance score. Both of these can easily lead to a large number of students not attending higher education institutions, which can be solved by encouraging them to apply for vocational schools (which provide specialized training in skills of a certain profession) or taking in-service training courses to fulfill their dream; however, the degrees must be clearly distinguished between full-time training and part-time training for avoidance of doubt.

Second, the curriculum must be renovated by reducing the number of subjects that are not really practical. Some subjects may not require students to go to lectures, but to do the research by themselves and turn in reports, thus saving time to focus on main subjects and increase the ability to self-study of students. The link between learning and practice must be strengthened by a policy of coordination between Ministry of Education and other ministries to make it an obligation for production and business institutions to receive interns, assign and guide them properly to do the job, so that students can experience the real world while they are still being trained at schools. In addition, there should be regulations on inviting leading experts, senior managers and directors from enterprises to participate in teaching specialized subjects. This can help universities to reduce the burden of serious shortage of teachers, and at the same time increase teaching quality and connect knowledge of students to practical experience of working people. Along with that, it is also necessary to change the way of compiling textbooks, select the best teachers for compilation, learn from the experience and textbooks of foreign countries and update the latest knowledge, so that our students do not lag behind.

Third, it is required to renovate teaching methods, which has a lot to do with the capability of teachers. If a good teacher has good pedagogical methods, he not only is able to fully equip students with knowledge in the best way, but also can inspire the love for the profession and the desire to learn of students. The problem is that there is a lack of lecturers with master's or doctoral degree in our country (especially in localities), and the training quality for these degrees is also limited<sup>iv</sup>. Lecturers are mainly striving to meet the criteria set by Ministry of Education and Training in order to be in charge of classes, rather than being interested in improving their actual competence. That

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<sup>iv</sup> <http://cand.com.vn/giao-duc/Nghich-ly-giao-su-tien-sy-nhieu-nhung-it-cong-trinh-cong-bo-quoc-te-480433/>

competence includes professional capability, teaching capability and research capability. Among them, lecturers mostly pay attention to professional and teaching capabilities, but are hardly interested in doing research, although this is a very important capability that creates knowledge and is a necessary part of universities. In addition, even the recruitment of lecturers is still improper in some places and at some points of time: those who are not really worthy are chosen while the truly capable ones are ignored because they don't have "*good relationships*". If the quality of teachers is not good, it is difficult to have good students. Therefore, in addition to selecting the right teachers, each university must have plans to regularly cultivate and improve professional qualifications of their lecturers, through: (1) long-term and full-time training (master's and doctoral degrees), (2) continuous training and cultivation to suit the development needs of each school and faculty; (3) requiring lecturers to study themselves and constantly improve their capabilities; (4) creating favorable environment and conditions for lecturers to promote their capabilities and always having assessments and emulations in place.

Last but not least, let's not forget to mention the issue of ensuring living standard for lecturers, so that this intellectual force is fully dedicated to the profession. This can only be achieved when the State has a worthy remuneration and incentive policy for teachers. However, once there is a reasonable policy, lecturers are also required to be really responsible for their work by rigorously assessing the quality of students, in which responsibilities of each teacher and each department in the training are clearly defined, to avoid the fact that "*students who have been admitted will definitely graduate*" while lecturers rush to teach in-service courses or teach in other localities, etc. to increase their income.

### **3. Conclusion**

Education is the cause of the whole Party and the entire people, and it cannot be completed overnight. However, as our country is falling behind compared to the general level of education in the region and the world, for our human resources to make more progress and meet the requirements of industrialization, modernization and international integration, we must act quickly with determination and methodical ways following a certain roadmap to success.

#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interests.

#### **About the Author**

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