

# **INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT**

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## **KNOWLEDGE ERA AND CHALLENGES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION**

Human beings has entered the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium with the emergence of a new era: knowledge era. In this era, knowledge becomes a huge power. In the past, socio-economic development of many countries used to depend on various resources: natural resource, labor resource and capital resource, which are traditional and basic capital of various economies. Even now, a number of countries still rely on them and consider them major foundation for their national development. However, nowadays more and more countries reach a very high level of socio-economic development. In those countries, knowledge / knowledge industry plays a very important role, becoming a major force of the national development and prosperity. So, in a knowledge-based economy, we do not simply rely on rich natural resources, huge population, advantageous geographical position or territory, although they are still valuable assets. The real situation of countries with developed knowledge economy proves a high quality human resource with creativity, and

ability to utilize new ideas or initiatives is the key factor of a nation's socio-economic growth and development.

In short, in this knowledge era, every society needs a human resource that is clever and committed to life-long study in order to have a good adaptation to rapid changes of social needs. Such resource can only be obtained through an advanced education that train resourceful individuals: having the ability to produce both tangible and intangible values such as creativity, initiative, perseverance and independence, etc.

Obviously this is the first era in human history seeing a vigorous knowledge creation. It is estimated that the knowledge volume of human society will be doubled after about seven years and become out-of-date very rapidly. Therefore, universities play a critical role in knowledge creation. They have to be pioneers and take the first rate in scientific research activities and become resources of new ideas or initiatives in order to meet the unceasing needs of social activities and dimensions.

## **PROBLEMS OF VIETNAM HIGHER EDUCATION**

Vietnam higher education has a long development history, undergoing different stages: feudalism, French and American domination, socialism, and free market economy - socialism oriented. It has got great achievements in training human resource for the cause of preserving national independence and developing national socio-economy. Moreover, Vietnamese scientists have contributed greatly into and confirm their positions in the world scientific community. However, in the process of renovating the economy and integrating into the world, Vietnam education in general, and its higher education in particular, have revealed weaknesses needed to be rapidly corrected.

This paper mainly discusses the issue of higher education. Regarding the policy, Vietnam Communist Party and the government always consider “Education and training as the most important national policy, the cause of the government and people”. Therefore, despite difficulties in the process of development, the national budget reserved for education always shares a considerable percentage, about 12%, and the figure is expected to be raised to 16% in the coming period (year 2003). However, current situation proves that in spite of the nation’s effort in reforming and renovating education to approach the world level, Vietnam higher education still have weaknesses:

1. *Unstable education development strategy.* After ten years of renovation (since 1986), Vietnam education development strategy has experienced difficulties in the followings:

- What is the suitable size of universities? Should we adopt school-year or credit system? or both?
- Should universities be equally distributed in various areas or concentrated in some major centers where there exists the most favourable learning condition? Should higher education be centralised or decentralised?
- The issue of university lecturers qualification? What is the appropriate ratio of professors – associate professors – lecturers and that ratio per student?
- The problem of guaranteeing training quality to satisfy the needs of supplying human resource for the society?
- University entrance exam plans are frequently changed, inconsistent, unstable, hence causing difficulties for many people, etc.

2. *Weak education management system.* Level of management among education institutions is not transparency, lack of accountability,

and overlapping. This can be seen in the relation between Ministry of Education & Training (MOET) and National University, or between National University and other Universities, or between National University and its members (the case of VNU-HCMC): who is at the management level and who brings plans into being? Who holds responsibility in training curriculum? Should curriculum and learning materials be diversified or nationally unified? Should university autonomy be fully respected? In which correlation should supervising and supportive functions be carried out? In general, weaknesses in management make university activities distorted. They also cause difficulties in enhancing education quality and competitiveness of Vietnam universities, making them unable to join the ranking list with other regional or international universities. It can also be said that Vietnam higher education has not been fully ranked and positioned in order to have a milestone for effort for future development.

3. *Backward methodology.* Methodology is slowly changed and learning style is very outdated: rote learning still exists in almost universities, especially in high schools. Rote learning is very popular prior to term or final examinations and makes learners passive “recorders”. It is no longer appropriate with the multiplied information nowadays. In fact, Vietnam universities are very concerned about changing methodology and learning style, encouraging the shift from lecturer-centered to learner-centered. However, there are a lot of difficulties because of the lack of study advisers, facilities and materials. That explains why the traditional lecturing style still has a major role. It decreases student independence, proactiveness and creativity, leading to backwardness of higher education quality. Vietnam education can

not meet the needs of social development. The issue of re-educate labours before use is becoming very popular, costing a lot of money and efforts of the society, wasting time and discouraging learners' will and self-confidence.

4. *More investment into education technology, yet ineffective exploitation and usage.* Along with the nation socio-economic development, Vietnam education in general and higher education in particular are more and more well equipped. University infrastructure is better compared to the previous time, with the establishment of: modern laboratories, multimedia rooms, modern libraries with many audio-visual and online data retrieving facility, centers with dozens or hundreds of computers, LAN and internet, etc. All these efforts are to enhance Vietnam higher education. However, the process of exploitation and usage reveals weaknesses: (1) very low percentage of regular users (including lecturers and students) of modern facilities; (2) computers are used as a decoration, mainly for basic writing tasks; (3) limitation of using internet or e-mail, designing web pages, etc. The main reasons originate from the lack of skills in using computers and English: most of middle-aged and older lecturers are not adaptable to those skills, and students are not well trained. Besides, the bureaucracy in management (only work during office hours) impedes those who want to use computers (they are busy studying and lecturing in office hours). The consequence is that advanced costly facilities are used ineffectively.

All the above mentioned issues can be observed in many education institutions in Vietnam. Is it internal limitation of any developing countries in the world? Sharing the same view, Chee Khiew Boey và Swe

Khine Myint (1994) have pointed out common difficulties faced by ASEAN lecturers in using technology in education: (1) lack of facilities and equipments; (2) no proper training; (3) lack of professional staff; (4) too many teaching hours; (5) no allocation of funds; (6) security problems for equipment; and (7) too much extra curricular activities.

## **INNOVATIVE MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO MEET THE CONTEMPORARY NEEDS**

In this knowledge era, in order to meet the needs of national industrialization and modernization, of socio-economic development and living standard increase, of facilitating the integration process of Vietnam into regional and international countries, one important task of Vietnam government is to have adequate investment in enhancing education quality, especially at the higher education level. That will help to train high quality human resource useful not only for the time being but also for the future. Vietnam higher education needs innovations in such issues as:

- *Complement and fulfill the goals of Vietnam higher education – to provide human resource that has the highest capability to meet the needs of social development in the information and knowledge era.* Indispensable attributes of education products in this new era are: flexibility, creative, liberal and independent. This means education have to produce creative citizens to meet the needs of national development.
- *Enhance competitiveness in higher education, training human resource having compatible skills with scientific and technological advancement.* Improve step by step the training and management quality to integrate into international education and

reach standards of education accreditation, assurance, assessment and control. The utmost goal is to enable Vietnam universities to join the international ranking. In short, the final aim of a competitive education is to establish an active and advanced competence-based society.

- *A very significant requirement of higher education is to produce learners having the ability to “learn to know, learn to do, learn to live in harmony with other people” (UNESCO spirit). Therefore, higher education not only provides knowledge, but also train learners inter-personal and communication skills, and the ability to work with others. This is the principal role of higher education to ensure that graduates will be active in cooperating with the community and sharing their experience and knowledge.*

Experience of many countries in the world proves that in order to overcome the above mentioned challenges, it is necessary to reform higher education management, which contributes greatly to the overall situation. The reform contents can be analyzed as follows:

1. Improve autonomy and accountability. Although being frequently repeated, the process of carrying out real autonomy in universities is still a big requirement. Autonomy can be understood in terms of accomplishing set goals satisfactorily. Autonomy will lead to the freedom in making decision in academic related issues (school year, learners, lecturers, learning system, curriculum, academic units, methodology, etc.), through which it is possible to identify distinct characteristics and culture of each university. Besides autonomy, it is necessary to talk about the university accountability to public who can be understood as supporters of higher education. A president of the University of

California considers his school's accountability towards public as to "Make no mistake". That may be the common slogan of various universities in order to have adequate considerations to the task of improving human resource training quality to serve national socio-economic development.

2. Apply effectively education technology in training and managing universities. Education technology emphasized here means information technology - IT and communication technology – CT, both of them can be combined in to information – communication technology (ICT). At the moment, it can be said that both IT and CT exist regularly in our daily lives through our usage of equipments and facilities such as PC, scanner, digital camera, VCRs, telephones, fasimiles, modems, etc. The application of ICT in universities is an urgent needs since it brings about basic benefits: (a) improve teaching and learning effectiveness; (b) improve effectiveness of academic management and administration; (c) enhance university affection and role in public's mind. In short, ICT application brings about benefits for various objectives:

+ *Learners*: have the ability to develop and enhance their knowledge, understanding, skills, creativity and independence in the learning process.;

+ *Teachers*: have the ability to enhance knowledge, understanding, skills, creativity and independence of learners in the teaching process; besides, teachers take an active role in class management and other related administration issues;

+ *Administrators, leaders*: their management tasks run more smoothly and they are able to carry out set goals regarding learning, teaching, management, administration; moreover, thanks to ICT, administrators can transfer or inspire other people (including teachers and learners) and create a creative and healthy environment;

+ *Families, business and people*: ICT will send university rapid and reliable feedback to families, society, businessmen.

3. *Renovate human resource management in universities*. In the current situation of Vietnam, renovating human resource management is a critical task to control widespread bureaucracy, irresponsibility in many universities. Objectives of renovation process include: teachers and administrators. This requires university leaders have to set up appropriate policy of management and administration, paying attention to the followings:

- Standardize human resource qualification to comply with teaching or administration requirement;
- Recruitment should be carried out through equal competition rather than profile review;
- Increase regular professional training under various forms...
- Right and in time appraisal and punishment...

In general, personnel management plays a major role in improving training quality of universities. *The fact that resolutions in enhancing autonomy, accountability or application of IT, CT in management will be successful or not depends on personnel management of every university. They should have appropriate policies to encourage everybody (teachers, learners, staff) to work*

*with high responsibility and self-respect in order to keep pace with contemporary needs and reach world-class.*

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