

Revamping Higher Education in Vietnam: Obstacles and Remedies

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Abstract

This study analyzes the present condition of higher education reform in Vietnam and suggests remedies to tackle significant obstacles. By utilizing contemporary policy documents and research, we examine the advancements made in implementing extensive changes, as well as the ongoing challenges in areas such as curriculum, teaching methodologies, research productivity, and university independence. Our research suggests that while there have been some good advancements, the quality of Vietnamese higher education still falls short of regional benchmarks in various significant areas. We contend that Vietnamese universities require more profound alterations in educational philosophy, institutional governance, faculty development, and international integration in order to enhance their quality and competitiveness. The paper ends with policy recommendations aimed at expediting the reform process.

Keywords: Higher Education Reform, Vietnam, University Autonomy, Faculty Development, Internationalization.

Introduction

Vietnam has placed significant emphasis on reforming higher education in order to cultivate a skilled workforce that can contribute to economic growth and global integration. The Communist Party's 2013 Resolution on Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Education and Training established ambitious objectives to modernize the higher education system and align it with regional and global benchmarks by 2030 (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013).

This study seeks to evaluate the advancement of higher education reform in Vietnam during the last 10 years and pinpoint enduring obstacles that require attention. We examine contemporary advancements in domains such as institutional independence, curriculum modification, pedagogical approaches, research productivity, and global collaboration. Using this research as a basis, we suggest implementing governmental measures to expedite the process of transforming Vietnamese higher education.

The necessity to change higher education in Vietnam arises from both domestic developmental requirements and global patterns. Vietnam's shift from a centrally-planned to a market-oriented economy has resulted in a need for highly qualified people resources. The nation's efforts to industrialize and modernize necessitate a workforce that possesses the ability to innovate, think critically, and adapt. Nevertheless, the current higher education system, which has been heavily influenced by the historical practice of central planning, has encountered difficulties in adapting to these changing requirements.

Externally, the swift progress of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and growing global economic integration have heightened the need for reform. Higher education institutions in Vietnam are now required to compete internationally, ensuring that graduates are equipped for a globalized world and making a positive impact on the country's technological and economic competitiveness. The increasing focus on university rankings and research productivity has further underscored the disparities between Vietnamese institutions and their competitors in the area and around the world.

The Vietnamese government has acknowledged these difficulties and has implemented substantial measures to overhaul the higher education sector. The Higher Education Law of 2012, which was modified in 2018, established a legal structure to enhance institutional independence and responsibility. The government has

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additionally enforced laws to stimulate research, improve teaching excellence, and cultivate international collaborations.

Notwithstanding these endeavors, advancement has been inconsistent, and substantial obstacles persist. A significant number of Vietnamese universities continue to face challenges related to obsolete curricula, passive learning approaches, and restricted research capacities. The disparity between the skills possessed by graduates and the requirements of the job market remains a significant issue, as employers frequently highlight the absence of hands-on abilities among recent graduates.

This study analyzes the present condition of higher education reform in Vietnam from various perspectives:

Institutional autonomy and governance: We evaluate the degree to which universities have achieved authentic independence in academic, financial, and personnel affairs, as well as the difficulties encountered in implementing novel governance frameworks.

Our analysis focuses on initiatives aimed at updating curricula, implementing interactive and student-centered teaching methods, and incorporating soft skills and practical training into degree programs.

We assess the expansion of research activities and global publications, as well as the ongoing obstacles to improving the quality and influence of research.

Our focus is on analyzing efforts to enhance international cooperation, attract students and professors from outside, and align Vietnamese higher education with worldwide benchmarks.

Our focus is on evaluating the establishment and impact of quality assurance measures in promoting institutional enhancement.

We examine alterations in funding methods, tuition regulations, and endeavors to broaden revenue streams for universities, focusing on financing and resource distribution.

Through a thorough analysis of these crucial aspects, our objective is to offer a thorough overview of the advancements and obstacles encountered in Vietnam's journey towards reforming its higher education system. The study we conducted utilizes a variety of sources, including as government publications, academic studies, international assessments, and stakeholder interviews.

The paper is organized in the following manner: Section 2 offers a concise summary of the historical background and policy framework that have shaped the reform of higher education in Vietnam. Section 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the most recent advancements and ongoing difficulties in each of the aforementioned crucial domains. Section 4 examines the consequences of our discoveries and suggests policy suggestions to tackle recognized deficiencies and expedite reform endeavors. Section 5 finishes by providing comments on the future prospects of Vietnamese higher education and its contribution to the growth of the country.

In order to achieve its goal of attaining upper-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income status by 2045, Vietnam's higher education reform endeavors will play a pivotal role in determining its success. An up-to-date and excellent higher education system is crucial not just for generating proficient graduates, but also for stimulating innovation, promoting economic diversification, and improving the country's worldwide competitiveness.

This report enhances the ongoing discussion on higher education reform in Vietnam by conducting a thorough evaluation of the progress made so far and presenting recommendations for future policy directions based on solid facts. Through the identification of both accomplishments and ongoing obstacles, our aim is to provide valuable insights to policymakers, university executives, and other relevant parties in their efforts to actualize the aspiration of establishing a top-tier higher education system that can drive Vietnam's sustained progress and global integration.

Current State of Higher Education Reform in Vietnam

Policy Framework

There has been substantial progress in the legislative and policy framework for higher education reform in Vietnam in recent years. Essential documents comprise:

Resolution 29-NQ/TW (2013) regarding the reform of education that is fundamental and complete; Revised legislation regarding higher education, enacted in 2018; and revised Education Legislation (2019).

The policies have prioritized the expansion of institutional independence, the enhancement of quality assurance systems, the encouragement of research activities, and the facilitation of international collaboration (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019).

The 2013 Resolution 29-NQ/TW outlined a plan for a "fundamental and comprehensive overhaul of education and training" in order to fulfill the needs of industrialization and modernization within the framework of a socialist-oriented market economy and global integration. The importance of overhauling the curriculum, teaching techniques, evaluation methodologies, and administration of higher education institutions was underscored.

The 2018 revisions to the Law on Higher Education solidified the ideas of institution autonomy and accountability. The main provisions contained were:

Providing universities with increased independence in matters related to academic concerns, organizational structure, human resources, and financing; Creating university councils as the supreme governing bodies; Promoting the advancement of top-tier colleges on a global scale; and fostering collaboration and connections between universities and businesses.

The 2019 revised Law on Education established a comprehensive framework that encompasses the whole education system, including higher education. The state's dedication to educational advancement was reinforced, and it provided a clear explanation of fundamental values such as prioritizing the student, promoting lifelong learning, and emphasizing education for the progress of the nation.

In order to put these objectives into action, the Ministry of Education and Training has produced a range of decrees and circulars that offer more specific restrictions. An instance of this is Circular 04/2016/TT-BGDĐT, which establishes the criteria and processes for accrediting higher education institutions.

In order to expedite reforms, the government has implemented programs such as the Higher Education Development Policy Program and the Vietnam - New Model University Project. These efforts have concentrated on domains such as governance, funding, quality control, and research capability.

Nevertheless, the execution of autonomy policies has encountered obstacles. Several universities still lack expertise in self-governance, while state authority continues to exert significant influence in areas such as the selection of rectors and the approval of curricula. Policymakers are constantly modifying the regulatory framework to find a balance between autonomy and accountability.

Policy development has been significantly influenced by international cooperation. Vietnam has utilized the knowledge and practices of countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and neighboring countries in formulating its higher education strategy. Prominent development partners, including the World Bank, have offered both technical aid and financial resources to facilitate reforms.

In the future, the government aims to create a higher education system that is more varied, incorporating a combination of public, private, and international institutions. The Education Development Strategy 2021-2030 highlights the main areas of focus, which are: Facilitating collaborations between universities and industries; Establishing a consortium of prestigious research universities; Improving the caliber and

applicability of training programs; Advancing scientific research and facilitating the transfer of technology; Enhancing the administration and oversight of tertiary education; and enhancing global collaboration and integration.

In order to achieve its goal of attaining upper-middle income status by 2030, Vietnam must prioritize the ongoing reform and advancement of its higher education system. Policymakers are confronted with the task of establishing a conducive atmosphere for universities to flourish, while also guaranteeing fair and equal opportunities for access and upholding the standards of education. Attaining Vietnam's ambitious objectives for higher education would heavily rely on meticulous policy formulation and efficient execution.

Achievements

Vietnam has achieved significant results in executing higher education reform efforts over a span of 8 years. Vietnam has systematically incorporated the perspectives and substance of Resolution 29-NQ/TW on comprehensive education reform into its official policies and legislation. In 2018 and 2019, the National Assembly passed the Law on Amendments to the Higher Education Law (2018) and the Education Law (2019), which were drafted by the Ministry of Education and Training. These laws have been gradually implemented, establishing a legal framework for activities aimed at reforming higher education.

Higher education institutions have proliferated nationwide, enhancing equal opportunity for everyone to access higher education. In terms of the governance and administration of the higher education system, Vietnam has implemented measures to enhance the autonomy of institutions. The level of higher education has steadily enhanced and is nearing global benchmarks. Vietnam's higher education system was ranked 68th out of 196 nations worldwide in 2019, which is an improvement of 12 places compared to the previous year.

The implementation of quality assurance and accreditation activities has grown more methodical. By December 31, 2020, a total of 149 higher education institutions and 9 pedagogical colleges in Vietnam have successfully met the accreditation standards set by the country's higher education quality accreditation criteria. This accounts for approximately 55% of all universities in the nation. Out of these, 7 universities have received recognition from international accreditation agencies. In 2020, Vietnam achieved a significant milestone by having three of its universities, namely Vietnam National University Hanoi, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, and Hanoi University of Science and Technology, listed among the top 1000 universities globally. The ranking of top universities in Asia included eight Vietnamese universities [1].

University rankings have increased alongside enhancements in teacher quality, as per international benchmarks. Starting from 2018, there have been new regulations that mandate candidates for professorship, associate professorship, and doctoral degrees to have publications in prestigious international journals that are indexed in ISI or Scopus. This is a change from the former practice, where foreign publications were not a requirement for these academic recognitions. In 2019, Vietnamese writers published a total of 12,475 scientific publications in ISI/Scopus journals, which placed Vietnam in the 49th position globally. This is a 2.7-fold increase compared to the number of articles published in 2015. In 2020, the Vietnamese education system had a 6% share of lecturers holding professor and associate professor titles, and a 22.7% proportion of lecturers having PhD degrees [1].

The proliferation of the higher education system has enhanced accessibility and fairness. Universities and colleges have expanded their presence nationwide, offering increased access to higher education for students from various geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. This has effectively mitigated gaps in educational achievement between urban and rural regions.

Universities have experienced a progressive growth in institutional autonomy, which has granted them greater flexibility in academic, financial, and personnel affairs. Although there are still limitations when compared to international norms, the enhanced autonomy has allowed several top universities to become more sensitive to society requirements and strive for quality and innovation.

The implementation of an accreditation system and increased involvement of universities in assessment processes has led to the enhancement of quality assurance measures. The attainment of accreditation by more than 50% of universities signifies advancement in the establishment of standardized quality criteria throughout the higher education industry.

The research output and international publications have experienced substantial expansion, but starting from a small initial level. The significant surge in ISI/Scopus papers indicates the increasing ability and aspiration of Vietnamese academics to actively participate in the global research community. The inclusion of Vietnamese institutions in global rankings for the first time is a significant milestone that enhances the prominence and prestige of the country's higher education system on a worldwide scale.

The qualifications of faculty members have consistently enhanced, as the percentage of lecturers possessing doctoral degrees and the titles of professor or associate professor has increased. The implementation of new regulations mandating the inclusion of overseas publications as a criterion for academic promotions is aiding in the synchronization of Vietnamese academia with worldwide benchmarks for research output and influence.

The internationalization endeavors have grown, as an increasing number of Vietnamese universities are forming alliances with other schools to develop joint programs, facilitate student exchanges, and foster research collaboration. This initiative aims to provide Vietnamese students and academics with increased exposure to international viewpoints and practices.

Many universities have experienced an increase in investment in facilities and infrastructure, resulting in enhanced learning environments, equipment, and resources for students. Multiple institutions have constructed new campuses equipped with contemporary facilities to serve the increasing number of students.

Some universities have started implementing curriculum revisions to make their programs more competency-based and in line with the demands of the labor market. Efforts are being made to integrate additional practical training, enhance the development of soft skills, and increase industry engagement in degree programs.

Despite facing ongoing obstacles, Vietnam's accomplishments illustrate its unwavering dedication to reforming and advancing its higher education system in order to effectively support national development objectives and enhance its competitiveness on both regional and global scales. The achieved success establishes a basis for future improvements in the quality, pertinence, and global integration of higher education in Vietnam.

Persistent Challenges

Nevertheless, despite these accomplishments, Vietnamese higher education continues to encounter notable constraints. Overall, higher education in this region and globally still falls behind that of other countries. It has not adequately evolved in line with the demands and objectives, and has failed to meet the educational needs of the population. According to the 13th National Party Congress, the assessment was made that the training of human resources of excellent quality has not been able to meet the demands of economic and social progress.

The current imperative is to acknowledge and thoroughly understand the limitations and flaws in order to devise effective remedies that would propel Vietnamese higher education to a higher echelon.

In Vietnam, universities are typically structured based on specialized systems, such as the University of Water Resources, Medical University, Pharmaceutical University, University of Economics and Finance, Foreign Trade University, and others. While some colleges have started to provide a wider range of academic fields, they remain mostly focus on specific areas of study. Educational programs continue to

prioritize theoretical content while neglecting practical implementation and the application of acquired knowledge.

Furthermore, the education and training provided currently do not meet the necessary standards and objectives required for the country's socio-economic growth. Additionally, there is a lack of connection between the education system and the needs of the labor market. Presently, several institutions solely offer what they possess, rather than catering to the requirements of society. In 2020, Vietnam experienced a situation where 225,000 graduates, engineers, and masters were unable to secure employment in their respective fields or had to settle for jobs unrelated to their areas of expertise. This resulted in a significant loss of human resources. A survey was conducted on 60 enterprises in the industrial services sector in Ho Chi Minh City to evaluate the satisfaction level of enterprises with the quality of students trained in the first year after graduation. The evaluation criteria included theoretical knowledge, practical skills, foreign language proficiency, working style, and professional skills. The results showed that only 5% of the surveyed students were rated as good, 15% as fair, 30% as average, and 40% as unsatisfactory [3].

Moreover, when it comes to teaching methods and approaches, numerous colleges have yet to adopt the "learner-centered" method. In these institutions, professors continue to hold a prominent position, while learners remain largely passive, resulting in minimal contact between educators and students. The proliferation of knowledge and perpetual updates in curricula are also outcomes of teaching methodologies that prioritize the dissemination of specialized knowledge, which is consistently being augmented. Despite the implementation of credit programs in most universities, in line with the Ministry of Education and Training's policy, there has been a lack of substantial innovation compared to previous teaching methods. These methods remain largely similar to those used in general education. More specifically, there has been a lack of promotion of students' initiative; the education system still relies on obsolete and superficial methods of testing and evaluation; and there has been a neglect of providing adequate instruction on ethics, lifestyle, and work skills. This notion is illogical, given the objectives of general education and higher education diverge. The purpose of general education is to provide learners with fundamental knowledge and cultivate essential attributes. The purpose of higher education is to cultivate practical skills and foster creative thinking, while also imparting the ability to learn and conduct research. Hence, it is imperative to promptly address the prevailing issue of "teachers reading, students copying" in higher education.

Besides, despite some recent modifications, Vietnamese universities still lag significantly behind many regional countries in terms of the quantity of international publications. As international integration progresses, the number and caliber of research published in international scientific journals have become crucial indicators of the excellence of higher education in nations. Vietnam presently possesses approximately 9,000 professors and associate professors, 24,000 individuals with doctorate degrees, and over 100,000 individuals with master's degrees. However, the quantity of international publications remains relatively restricted, and the impact factor of Vietnam's scientific research is also inferior to certain neighboring countries, such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore [3].

Additionally, despite the prominence of university autonomy as a significant policy, there remains a lack of clarity on the differentiation between state management and governance activities within universities. Decree No. 77/NQ-CP, titled "On piloting innovation in operational mechanisms for public higher education institutions for the period 2014-2017," was issued by the Government on October 24, 2014. However, there is currently a shortage of precise legal provisions to effectively implement this decree. The role of the university council within universities remains ambiguous, with state management agencies exerting significant influence over various aspects and activities of the institution. This includes the appointment of the school council chairman, principal, staff members, determination of compensation levels, and setting spending rules for scientific work.

The ongoing difficulties emphasize the necessity for sustained reform endeavors to improve the caliber, pertinence, and competitiveness of Vietnam's higher education system. In order for Vietnamese higher education to satisfy national development needs and international standards in the future, it is essential to focus on areas such as updating the curriculum, improving teaching methods, strengthening the connection between universities and industries, enhancing research capabilities, and improving governance.

Key Areas for Further Reform

Reforming Educational Philosophy

The Vietnamese higher education system should transition from a paradigm that primarily focuses on transmitting knowledge to one that emphasizes the development of critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills. This necessitates a major overhaul of curriculum design, instructional methodologies, and assessment processes.

Vietnam's higher education system currently emphasizes the transmission of knowledge from academics to students through lectures and rote memorization. This technique is antiquated and insufficient in adequately training graduates for the contemporary workforce and knowledge-based economy. There is a need for a new educational philosophy that focuses on enhancing students' critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving talents, and their ability to learn throughout their lives.

Enacting this novel philosophy will necessitate extensive overhauls in various domains:

Curriculum design: The curricula should be revamped to integrate greater amounts of active learning, project-based assignments, internships, and chances for students to apply their knowledge to real-world issues. It is important to prioritize the development of transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and digital literacy in addition to subject-specific knowledge.

Teaching methods: Lectures ought to be complemented by additional interactive teaching approaches that include students as active participants in the learning process. Possible methods of instruction may encompass flipped classrooms, case studies, group discussions, simulations, and several other experiential learning approaches. Faculty will require instruction and assistance in order to embrace and implement these novel instructional methodologies.

Evaluation methodologies: Examinations that examine rote memorization should be substituted with more genuine methods of evaluation that gauge advanced cognitive abilities and the practical utilization of acquired knowledge. These may encompass assignments, lectures, collections of work, and other evaluations based on performance.

Learning settings should be reconfigured to optimize active learning, foster collaboration, and promote the integration of technology. This may necessitate capital expenditures for the acquisition of new equipment and the development of new infrastructure.

Enhanced student assistance is required to provide students with comprehensive academic advising and career guidance services, enabling them to effectively traverse a more adaptable curriculum and adequately prepare for their future professional endeavors.

Quality assurance: The evaluation of curricula and instruction in creating desirable graduate competences and outcomes will require the implementation of new techniques.

Implementing such substantial changes to educational thought and procedures would be arduous and will probably encounter opposition from stakeholders who are accustomed to conventional techniques. Nevertheless, it is vital for enhancing the caliber and pertinence of higher education in Vietnam. To achieve this transformation, it will be essential to have a well-defined vision and effective leadership.

Enhancing Institutional Autonomy

Although there has been an increase in autonomy in theory, its practical execution is still restricted. It is necessary to have a distinct separation between the management of the state and the governance of institutions. There is a need to enhance the authority and influence of university councils.

The policy objective of granting higher education institutions increased autonomy has been declared in Vietnam for a number of years, however, the pace of execution has been sluggish. In order to enable universities to be more responsive, inventive, and accountable, it is essential to have genuine institutional autonomy. Crucial domains that require increased independence encompass:

Academic affairs: Universities should possess complete autonomy in formulating curriculum, creating novel programs, establishing admissions standards, and conferring degrees, without being required to seek approval from the Ministry of Education and Training for each action.

Personnel: Institutions require independence to choose, advance, and remunerate academics and staff based on their own policies and priorities. The existing system of centrally-assigned worker quotas and salary scales is excessively inflexible.

Financial management: Universities should be granted enhanced autonomy in determining tuition fees, allocating budgets, and diversifying revenue streams. Financial independence must be accompanied with measures of accountability.

Organizational structure: Institutions should have the autonomy to define their own organizational structures, create new departments, and designate executives without undue government intervention.

In order to establish effective institutional autonomy, it is necessary to establish a distinct division between the state's involvement in policy-making and quality control, and the internal governance and management of universities. It is necessary to establish clear guidelines and practices that define the specific duties and powers of the Ministry of Education and Training, university councils, and university administrators.

There is a need to greatly enhance the role and capacity of university councils. Presently, some university councils merely exist in written form or fulfill a restricted consultative function. They should be granted the authority to make crucial strategic determinations, authorize financial plans, and enforce responsibility among university executives. The composition of the council should consist of a combination of both internal and external stakeholders who possess pertinent knowledge.

In order to improve autonomy, it will be necessary to make changes to the Higher Education Law and its associated rules. Additionally, it will require the development of skills and knowledge for university administrators and council members to successfully wield their increased authority. It may be wise to use a phased approach, beginning with pilot autonomy programs for specific institutions before expanding to a wider implementation.

In order to ensure responsible utilization of public funds and uphold educational standards, it is imperative to combine increased autonomy with effective accountability measures. This may involve implementing performance-based funding linked to agreed-upon KPIs, conducting regular external quality audits, and adhering to public reporting obligations.

Implementing a high-autonomy model would be intricate and is expected to encounter opposition from individuals who are committed to centralized authority. Nevertheless, global evidence demonstrates that more institutional autonomy is crucial for universities to flourish in a competitive and rapidly evolving context.

Faculty Development

Enhancing the caliber of the teaching personnel is of utmost importance. This necessitates the implementation of comprehensive human resource initiatives, encompassing:

Enabling the recruitment of highly qualified graduates for academic positions; Facilitating foreign experience and education Enhancing compensation and work environment.

The caliber and drive of the teachers are essential for enhancing the quality of higher education. Vietnam encounters notable obstacles in this domain, such as meager remuneration, burdensome teaching responsibilities, restricted research prospects, and the emigration of skilled individuals to the commercial sector or abroad. An all-encompassing approach to faculty development is required, incorporating various essential components:

Recruitment: Enhanced tactics are required to allure exceptional individuals to pursue academic professions. Examples of such initiatives may encompass the establishment of scholarship programs aimed at supporting exceptional students in their pursuit of doctoral degrees, with the condition that they commit to teaching roles. Additionally, there could be expedited promotion possibilities for individuals who consistently demonstrate outstanding performance, as well as focused efforts to recruit Vietnamese academics who have received education and training abroad.

Professional development: It is necessary to implement systematic programs that consistently enhance the knowledge and abilities of faculty members throughout their professional lives. The curriculum should encompass pedagogical training, research mentoring, workshops on grant-writing, and chances to participate in international conferences and training programs.

Performance assessment: There is a need for stronger methods to evaluate the quality of teaching and research, together with providing substantial incentives for outstanding performance. Enhanced consideration should be given to student comments in evaluating the quality of instruction.

Workload management: Teaching loads should be decreased in order to allocate more time for research and professional growth. The existing faculty compensation structure, which is based on the number of teaching hours, encourages an overemphasis on teaching while neglecting other scholarly pursuits.

Research support: Increased money and improved infrastructure are necessary to bolster faculty research, encompassing research sabbaticals, initial grants, state-of-the-art laboratory facilities, and research assistantships for students.

Industrial engagement initiatives such as faculty consultancy, industrial sabbaticals, and cooperative research projects can enhance the relevance of teaching and produce supplementary income for faculty members.

Compensation: It is necessary to increase academic salaries in order to enhance competitiveness with the private sector and other countries in the region. Performance-based incentives and the opportunity to augment earnings through research and consultation can be beneficial.

Optimal working conditions require investments in facilities, equipment, libraries, and IT infrastructure to establish a conducive environment for teaching and research. Having sufficient office space and access to administrative help is crucial.

Enhancing international collaboration: It is imperative to establish additional avenues for faculty exchanges, joint degree programs, and research collaborations with universities abroad. This can facilitate the exposure of Vietnamese academics to international best practices.

Development of leadership skills and abilities: There is a requirement for programs that aim to cultivate the next cohort of academic leaders. These programs should encompass management training and mentorship opportunities specifically designed for mid-career faculty members who show promise.

Significant financial investments will be necessary to implement comprehensive faculty development programs. Nevertheless, it is vital for enhancing the general caliber of higher education in Vietnam. A gradual implementation may be required, initially focusing on essential disciplines and institutions before gradually expanding to a wider scope.

Promoting Research and Innovation

Vietnamese universities must substantially enhance their research output and quality. Possible measures encompass:

Enhancing the allocation of resources for research and improving the existing infrastructure; Encouraging the production of publications on an international scale; Promoting partnerships between universities and industries.

Vietnamese universities have a lower research and innovation capacity compared to other institutions in the region, which is not enough to support the country's economic growth objectives. Enhancing the research ecosystem necessitates taking action on various fronts: Funding: There is a pressing need to significantly augment government expenditure in research and development in higher education. There is a need to broaden and simplify competitive grant programs. Implementing tax incentives may serve as a catalyst for increased private sector investment in university research.

Insufficient infrastructure: Numerous institutions suffer from a dearth of suitable laboratory facilities, equipment, and digital resources required for doing state-of-the-art research. There is a requirement for a significant initiative to improve infrastructure, which may involve assistance from development partners.

Human capital: As mentioned in the faculty development section, it is necessary to implement strategies to enhance research abilities, decrease teaching responsibilities, and establish rewards for research output. Increasing the number of PhD programs and postdoctoral posts is crucial for developing a strong pool of researchers.

International collaboration should be actively promoted and facilitated through joint research projects, faculty/student exchanges, and co-authored publications with international universities. This can enhance the quality and enhance the global recognition of Vietnamese research.

Enhancing university-industry links requires the establishment of more robust systems to promote the connection between academic researchers and business partners. This will enable the transfer of information and technology, as well as the alignment of research activities with economic demands. Examples of such initiatives may encompass industry-based PhD programs, innovation hubs, and assistance with commercialization.

Incentives: Promotion, tenure, and remuneration systems should prioritize research outputs and impact by assigning them higher importance. Well-designed financial incentives for publishing in major international journals can be beneficial.

The enhancement of the legal and administrative environment for intellectual property (IP) protection and commercialization is necessary in order to provide greater motivation for innovation.

There is a need to foster a more robust research culture that prioritizes honesty, ethics, and a commitment to quality. This encompasses instruction on research methodologies, procedures for peer evaluation, and ethical behavior.

Interdisciplinary collaboration should be promoted through institutional structures and financing methods in order to address intricate societal concerns.

Researchers should be offered training and support, such as English editing services, to assist them in publishing their work in foreign journals. Providing funding for open access publishing could enhance the international exposure of research conducted in Vietnam.

Research evaluation: Enhanced bibliometric and impact assessment techniques are required to appraise the quality and productivity of research at both individual and institutional levels. Enhancing postgraduate

education entails bolstering Masters and PhD programs by placing a stronger emphasis on conducting original research and publishing scholarly work. Collaborations with industry and international universities have the potential to improve the level of excellence.

Developing a robust university research ecosystem requires a considerable amount of time and consistent financial support. Nevertheless, it is vital for enhancing the general caliber and standing of Vietnamese higher education, as well as for fostering economic growth driven by innovation.

Accelerating Internationalization

Enhanced global integration has the potential to elevate standards. Possible tactics could encompass:

Promoting the establishment of foreign university campuses in Vietnam; Enhancing and broadening student and teacher exchange programs; Expanding the use of English as the primary language of education.

The process of internationalization is becoming increasingly crucial in enhancing the quality and pertinence of higher education. Vietnam has achieved advancements in this field, however, it is still falling behind many neighboring countries in the region. An enhanced global expansion plan could encompass:

International satellite campuses: It is necessary to formulate policies that will entice prestigious foreign universities to build campuses or collaborate on programs in Vietnam. This initiative can enhance the capabilities and familiarize Vietnamese students and instructors with global benchmarks. Quality assurance measures are necessary to verify that these programs align with national objectives.

Student mobility refers to the movement of students from one educational institution to another, either within the same country or internationally. Enhance and broaden the scope of scholarship initiatives for Vietnamese students, with a particular focus on facilitating their pursuit of advanced degrees overseas. Concurrently, enhance the influx of overseas students to Vietnam by implementing marketing strategies, offering English-taught programs, and simplifying visa procedures.

Faculty exchanges aim to enhance chances for Vietnamese faculty members to engage in teaching and research activities in foreign universities, while also facilitating the reciprocal exchange of faculty members from foreign universities to Vietnamese institutions. This can enhance the sharing of knowledge and foster research collaborations.

Curriculum internationalization is the integration of additional foreign information and views into curriculum across several academic areas. Establish further collaborative degree programs with international partners.

Implement a gradual expansion of English-medium instruction by progressively increasing the quantity of courses and programs delivered in English, with a particular focus on the graduate level and in the domains of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Offer linguistic assistance to both students and faculty.

Research collaboration: As previously mentioned, aim to cultivate additional international research alliances, collaborate on publishing papers together, and actively engage in conferences.

Quality assurance: Seek global certification for programs and institutions. Evaluate practices and standards by comparing them to those of top international universities.

Institutional partnerships: Establish extensive and diverse collaborations with specific international universities, including student and faculty exchanges, collaborative research, curriculum development, and other related activities.

Enhance international recruitment efforts by increasing the number of international faculty members, both for brief visits and extended appointments. Implementing this may necessitate modifications to recruitment protocols and remuneration schemes.

Global citizenship: Prioritize the cultivation of students' ability to interact effectively with people from different cultures, their understanding of global issues, and their proficiency in foreign languages, regardless of their field of study.

Utilize internet tools to expand the availability of international collaborative experiences to a wider array of students and faculty members.

Implement measures to enhance internationalization within the campus environment for students who are unable to participate in study abroad programs. This can be achieved by organizing a variety of activities, establishing student clubs with an international focus, and facilitating language partnerships.

Enhance the utilization of international alumni networks by effectively utilizing both Vietnamese individuals who studied abroad and foreign students who studied in Vietnam for purposes such as mentoring, internships, research collaboration, and more.

Governance: Ensure that the leadership and governing bodies of the university consist of persons who possess worldwide expertise and networks.

Marketing: Create a comprehensive branding and marketing plan to enhance the international reputation of Vietnamese institutions and increase the enrollment of international students and faculty.

Internationalization endeavors should be deliberate and coordinated with wider objectives in higher education and economic advancement. Although English is commonly used as a universal language, it is important to include initiatives that promote Vietnamese language and culture in internationalization programs.

Successfully implementing these reforms will necessitate a consistent and dedicated effort, substantial financial resources, and effective change management throughout the higher education system. Although they may provide difficulties, they are crucial for Vietnam to cultivate a higher education system that can compete on a global scale and stimulate economic growth and creativity in the future.

Policy Recommendations

According to the analysis provided, we suggest the following policy recommendations to expedite the reform and advancement of Vietnam's higher education system: Amend the higher education legislation to provide universities with increased substantive autonomy, particularly in the areas of financial and personnel administration. Universities' decision-making authority is still significantly constrained by the current legal framework, especially in regards to setting tuition prices, calculating faculty salaries, and managing their budgets. Providing institutions with greater operational freedom will enable them to better address societal demands and enhance efficiency. More precisely, the legislation should: Enable colleges to autonomously determine their tuition fees within a fair spectrum, instead of imposing fees through centralized mandates.

Grant institutions greater authority in faculty recruitment, advancement, and salary. Authorize universities to retain and distribute their earnings with reduced central supervision; Minimize the involvement of ministries in university governance and enhance the authority of university councils.

Create a comprehensive plan for enhancing the professional growth of faculty members at a national level, which encompasses better compensation and increased chances for international training.

The caliber of the faculty is essential for enhancing the overall educational excellence. Vietnam should initiate a comprehensive endeavor to augment the proficiency of university faculty by: Implementing

substantial salary raises for faculty members in order to effectively attract and retain highly skilled individuals, particularly in critical areas of expertise. Enhancing chances for faculty members to obtain higher-level degrees at prestigious international universities; Establishing a nationwide endowment to provide financial assistance for academic research conducted by faculty members and their participation in international conferences. Creating partnerships with prestigious global universities to provide faculty exchange programs.

Offering pedagogical instruction to enhance teaching techniques and utilization of technology; Establishing a method that is both transparent and based on merit to evaluate and promote academic members.

Enhance the allocation of government funds towards university research and establish more effective incentives to encourage collaboration between academia and industry.

In order to develop Vietnam's knowledge-based economy, it is imperative to enhance the research capabilities of universities. This necessitates: Significantly augmenting the state financial allocation for research conducted at universities; Revamping research funding systems to enhance competitiveness and prioritize merit-based allocation.

Providing tax incentives to firms to finance university research and engage in collaboration with academics; Expanding the number of prestigious institutions with research centers of exceptional quality; Developing a comprehensive national framework for assessing the success of university research; Promoting the commercialization of research results from universities by establishing technology transfer offices.

Implement a governmental scholarship initiative aimed at providing financial assistance to Vietnamese students and faculty members, enabling them to pursue higher education or engage in research activities at prestigious international universities.

Access to top-tier institutions is crucial for improving national standards. An extensive, performance-driven scholarship initiative ought to be established in order to: Sponsor exceptional Vietnamese students to study undergraduate and graduate degrees overseas; Assist academic members in pursuing PhD studies or engaging in postdoctoral research at prestigious overseas universities. Enable expedited study visits and exchanges for both students and professors. Give priority to subjects that are in line with the country's development needs, such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and public policy. Enforce stipulations mandating that scholarship recipients must return to and engage in employment in Vietnam.

Enhance the operational environment for international universities in Vietnam, while ensuring adequate quality oversight.

Having reputable international providers can enhance the whole system. Vietnam ought to:

Simplify the procedures for granting approval to foreign colleges seeking to build campuses or collaborate on educational initiatives; Enable overseas providers to have more freedom in designing and delivering their curriculum.

Promote the establishment of research institutes or graduate programs in Vietnam by prestigious international universities.

Promote the seamless transfer of credits and establish collaborative programs between Vietnamese and international educational institutions.

Implement stringent yet equitable quality assurance procedures for foreign providers; Revise university admissions to prioritize comprehensive examination rather than solely relying on test scores.

The existing examination-based admissions approach encourages memorization and does not effectively recognize the complete capabilities of pupils. A method that is more thorough should: Minimize dependence on the national high school graduation exam as a criterion for admission to universities; Grant institutions greater independence in establishing admissions criteria and procedures.

Promote the evaluation of elements such as extracurricular activities, interviews, and reference letters.

Implement pilot programs to assess the viability of test-optional admissions policies at certain universities.

Revamp educational curricula and teaching methods to cultivate skills necessary for the 21st century.

Several university programs still maintain an excessive focus on theory and lack practical relevance to real-world demands. Reforms should prioritize: Revising educational programs in collaboration with the business sector to guarantee their applicability; Incorporating additional project-based learning, internships, and hands-on experiences; Highlighting proficiencies such as analytical reasoning, collaborative problem-solving, effective communication, and proficiency in utilizing digital tools and technologies; Enhancing the provision of transdisciplinary learning opportunities; Integrating business education into several academic fields; Allocate resources towards the development and enhancement of digital infrastructure and the implementation of online and blended learning capabilities.

The COVID-19 epidemic underscored the significance of technological preparedness in higher education. Key considerations should encompass: Enhancing the IT infrastructure and learning management systems on campus; Providing instruction to faculty members on the principles and techniques of teaching online and blended courses, as well as the use of educational technology resources; Creating Vietnamese MOOCs and online degree programs of exceptional quality; Enhancing internet accessibility for students residing in rural or distant regions; Establishing a nationwide digital library and open educational resources (OER) repository for higher education; Enhance quality assurance mechanisms and foster a culture of ongoing enhancement.

Although there has been some advancement, the quality of the system still varies. Essential metrics to consider are: Adapting accrediting standards and processes to conform with global norms; Enhancing the capabilities of the accreditation agency and providing further training for highly skilled peer reviewers; Mandating the use of internal quality assurance systems in all institutions; Promoting the utilization of learning outcomes assessment to facilitate enhancement; Enhancing openness by releasing additional data on institutional performance; Promote increased globalization of Vietnamese higher education.

Enhanced worldwide involvement is crucial for elevating benchmarks. Furthermore, Vietnam should: Establish objectives for increasing the number of international students admitted and for recruiting new faculty members; Enhance the provision of education in English as the primary language of teaching, with a particular focus on the postgraduate level; Advocate for the expansion of academic journals to align with global publishing criteria; Promote and support international research collaborations and the establishment of collaborative PhD programs; Promote the establishment of international branches/programs by Vietnamese universities.

Conclusion

Vietnam has made significant progress in restructuring its higher education system in the last ten years. The proliferation of access, heightened institutional autonomy, reinforced quality assurance, and burgeoning international involvement have established a basis for continued advancement. Nevertheless, it is vital to implement significant alterations in order to enhance the quality of education to meet international benchmarks and equip graduates with the necessary competencies for a swiftly developing economy.

Vietnam may expedite the process of transforming its universities into top-tier institutions that foster national development and innovation by prioritizing the major areas discussed in this article, including educational philosophy, autonomy, faculty quality, research capability, and internationalization. Addressing

this issue would necessitate a consistent and determined commitment from political leaders, increased financial support from the public sector, and the active involvement of all relevant parties, including government bodies, institutions, industry representatives, and international collaborators.

Enacting these reforms would be a challenging task and is expected to encounter opposition from entrenched stakeholders. Nevertheless, the consequences of not taking action are significantly more substantial. The quality of a country's higher education system plays a crucial role in determining its long-term prosperity and competitiveness in today's knowledge-based global economy. Vietnam has made significant economic advancements during the past three decades of implementing doi moi reforms. In order to maintain this course of development and prevent falling into the middle-income trap, Vietnam must now undertake a similarly ambitious and revolutionary effort to reinvent its institutions.

The upcoming journey is arduous yet brimming with potential. Vietnam possesses significant potential to establish a top-tier higher education system that is highly regarded both in Asia and globally, thanks to its youthful and ambitious population, as well as its strong cultural emphasis on education. Unlocking this potential necessitates foresight, dedication, and a readiness to wholeheartedly embrace transformation at every level. The ideas outlined in this article offer a clear and precise plan for navigating this crucial undertaking. By taking prompt and resolute action, Vietnam has the opportunity to strategically position its universities, as well as the entire nation, for prosperity in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

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