

The Impact of Globalisation on the Reform of Higher Education in Vietnam

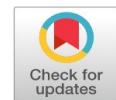
QUYNH ANH LE *

Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Pecs, Pecs, Hungary

Abstract: In this paper, the impact of globalization on higher education in Vietnam will be illustrated. This paper reviews literature of scholars about the higher education reform in Vietnam to figure out how globalization affects the change in Vietnamese higher education policies and practices. The Vietnam higher education system began privatized and internationalized as a part of the higher education reforms. The process of internationalization of higher education will be discussed. The author points out that Vietnam needs to enhance education quality to improve its competitiveness in the Asia-Pacific region. The curricula need to be updated, research and development capacity needs to be increased, and higher education institutions should be given more autonomy freedom. Thus, the quality of the human resource will be improved, and the country can achieve the target in the modernization of the nation.

Key Words: Globalization, Vietnam, higher education, Internationalization

Received: 04 August 2016 / Accepted: 10 October 2016 / Published: 23 December 2016



INTRODUCTION

Globalization has accelerated since the 1980s and has created a significant impact in various fields, including higher education. Globalization has connected nations around the world closer through removing barrier of trade. Vietnam could not be an exception from this trend. After many years of implementing the centralized economy under Soviet influence, in 1986, Vietnam adopted the Open door policy or in other word - Reform policy which replaced the centralized economy with the market-oriented economy. This shift provided an important backdrop to the reconstruction of the economy. Since then, the economy is growing dramatically and the Vietnamese's living standard is increasing. Before 1986, Vietnam was among the poorest countries in the world. In 2014, the GDP per capita of Vietnamese has surpassed \$US 2,000 and joined lower-middle income group (World Bank, 2016). Cheap, low-skilled labor and natural resources exploitation show the main competitiveness of the economy.

The population of Vietnam is around 90 million people. However, Vietnamese education educates a small proportion of young people at higher education level and meets strong pressure in human resource to contribute to economic growth (Altbach, 2004a). Higher education is believed to bring into the global trade framework by the liberalization of trade in educational service, which is promoted under World Trade Organization (Chen, 2015). Therefore, as a part of the education reforms, Vietnamese higher education system began privatized and internationalized.

In this paper, the author will illustrate how globalization makes effect on higher education in Vietnam. This paper reviews literature of scholars regarding the higher education reform in Vietnam to figure out how globalization affects the change in policies and practices of Vietnamese higher education. The process of internationalization of higher education will be discussed. The author points out that Vietnam needs to strengthen the cooperation with partners from developed countries to enhance the education quality and improve the competitiveness in Southeast Asia. The curricula need to be updated, the capacity of research and development needs to be increased and the quality of teaching and learning should be enhanced through internationalization of the Vietnamese education system. Thus, the quality of the human resource will be improved and the country can achieve the target in modernization of the nation.

*Corresponding author: Quynh Anh Le

†Email: Lequynhanh46@gmail.com

GLOBALIZATION AND INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Globalization became the phenomenon in the late 20th century, which involves the activities in large aspects such as politics, military, culture, immigration and environment (Yang, 2003). Globalization not only leads to the evolution of the world-wide market, foreign direct investment and cross-border mobility of production but also inclines world-wide culture, communications, information and knowledge to one world community (Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007). The wealth of nations and the well-being of people of each country were changed from natural resources in the past to knowledge today (Nayyar, 2008). The advance in technology and movement of knowledge has contributed to the globalization process (Altbach, 2004b). Therefore, to achieve economic development, each country, especially developing countries need to invest in higher education and training. Globalization in higher education was defined by Altbach & Knight (2007) as the forces of economy, politics and society toward the stronger international integration of higher education in the 21st century. Torres and Schugurensky (2002) suggested that globalization can lead to the blurring border, the constitution of national and interest group identities or the solidarity alteration within and between countries.

Globalization in higher education refers to the use of English as lingua franca for scientific communication; the growth of information technology and communications, international labour market for researchers and research integration (Altbach & Knight, 2007). The globalization process has transformed higher education across the world and developing countries integrate into international practice to meet the global demand (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002). In 21st century, no academic system can survive by itself (Altbach, 2004b).

Globalization is often confused with internationalization of higher education. Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends and the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas while internationalization is the policies and practices which academic systems and institutions or individuals adopt to meet the global academic environment (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 1997). It can be said that internationalization of higher education is responsive of a higher education system to the impact of globalization and individuality of its nation is respected (Knight, 1997). Knight (1993) defined internationalization of higher education as the process of integrating an international/ intercultural dimension into education, research activities and service functions of higher education institutions. Globalization is unable to change the circumstance while internationalization is the choice (Altbach, 2002). The development of knowledge, language, curriculum and trading are the motivations for the internationalization of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Various forms of internationalization can be seen in the movement of students and education programs across the globe, establishing of branch campus or transnational education programs and online education.

THE HISTORICAL VIEW OF VIETNAM'S HIGHER EDUCATION

The education development of Vietnam went through many changes in its long history. It has received the great influence from China, with the occupying of Confucianism's teaching for hundreds of year. In 1046, the first higher education institution in Vietnam had been built to teach Confucianism. Traditional Chinese (Kanji) was the official language at the school before the 20th century. Confucianism was considered as the starting-base of the education of Vietnam.

In the modern time, the role and structure of modern Vietnamese higher education institution come from Western countries. Altbach (2004a) stated that the origin of Vietnamese universities, as other Asian universities, is not truly Asian. Vietnamese higher education has undergone three big changes because of the political changing. Vietnam was colonized by French in the mid of the 19th century. After hundreds of years of teaching Confucianism, education in Vietnam had a big transformation to the Western style. The Confucianism system was replaced by the French educational system, the official teaching language shifted to French and the curricula mirrored the curricula in French (Pham & Fry, 2004). French abandoned the last Confucian examination in the South in 1864, in the North in 1915 and in Central Vietnam in 1918 (Bowen, Nguyen & Weigl, 1998). This marked the first stage of Westernized education system.

In 1945, Vietnam achieved independence. In 1954, the country had split into two countries: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). Since then, the applying of French higher education was ended. The second transformation of higher education happened for the next 30 years when higher education in North Vietnam followed the Soviet higher education system whereas South Vietnam applied the American higher education system (Pham & Fry, 2002). Vietnamese with the use of Latin characters was the national teaching language in North Vietnam since 1954 and in South Vietnam since 1966. In North Vietnam, the central planning in education was applied. The curriculum and teaching methods followed the Soviet Union's model. All universities in North Vietnam were state-run and specialized narrowly such as agriculture, science, engineering and technology. Although students needed to pass the entrance exam to the universities, however, if they did not have the qualified background, they would not enter the universities. In fact, students who were not from working class (proletariat) often did not qualify to go to the university entrance exam. Students were assigned to work at the state-owned agencies after graduation and serve the communist target of the country. On the contrary, the influence of American education on South Vietnam led to the emphasizing on sciences, laws, economy and administration in the scope of higher education. It reflected the aims of fostering economy to facilitate the war against North Vietnam. Since the unifying of North and South Vietnam in 1975, the Soviet higher education system became the model in the whole country. Russian was the required foreign language course in the Vietnamese national education framework. Except medical studies following the French instruction, all higher education programs strictly followed the Soviet curriculum.

Due to the collapse of communist in East Europe countries, the government needed to re-plan the political and economic strategies when financial aid from East Europe countries was ceased. The third change of the Vietnamese higher education system followed the Reform policy (or the Open door policy) in 1986. English replaced Russian to become the required 2nd language course. The outdated textbook and curriculum were replaced. Higher education was no longer regulated strictly following the plan of the state. The universities implemented flexible and diversified programs to serve the masses to meet the desire of society. The job structure went through a big change when students' job was no longer assigned by the state. Realizing that higher education is the key factor in economic development, the government showed the support in the international integration of higher education. The integration process of Vietnamese education system into the international scene shows the aim in recognition of Vietnamese degree internationally (Pham & Fry, 2004).

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF POLICY AND THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

Ngo, Lingard and Mitchell (2006) suggested that the globalized policy reconstructed education as part of economic policy providing required human workforce. The approval of Reform policy by the Sixth Congress of the Communist Party in 1986 allowed all sectors of the economy to move toward the market-oriented economy to support economic development. Education and training became the top priorities, reflected in the long-term policy and planning, aimed to prepare the high skilled workforce for the modernization process of the nation. Lam (1992) supposed that higher education reform played a vital role in responding to the diversity of society's demand.

The Reform marked the change in education and training in various ways. The national budget on education is continuously growing. In 1996, the investment on education was 10.8%, increased to 15% of the total national budget in 2001 and became stable at 20% since 2007 (Nguyen, 2007; UNESCO, 2015). Furthermore, the State affirmed that investment on education is the investment in development; ensured that the budget on education would be increased over 20% of the total national budget, depending on socio-economic conditions (UNESCO, 2015). The number of higher education institutions has enlarged quadruple. There were no private institutions, only 101 public higher education institutions in 1987 (Ministry of Education and Training 2013). By 2015, Vietnam had established 436 higher educational institutions including 347 public and 89 private institutions, the number of institutions quadrupled, compared to 1987, with 1,603,484 students studying at all higher education levels (General Statistics

Office of Vietnam, 2016). The prohibition of the private sector was ended, hence the number of private institutions increased dramatically. Before 1986, the Ministry of Education controlled the tuition fee norm and financial plan of each higher education institution strictly. After reform, although there were some limits, the changing of finance policy allowed public institutions to have autonomy in finance. The income of private higher education institutions depends almost entirely on tuition-fee (90 per cent of their income) while public higher education institutions, which receive the funds from the state, depend on the tuition fee that is much lesser (Hayden & Lam, 2010).

The Reform in 1986 marks the open door for internationalization of the higher education process. The most important adjustment in the education curriculum is the shifting in the required foreign language course. According to Nunan (2003), policy and education practice in Vietnam cannot escape from the globalization of English. Even though Socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had not collapsed, in 1986, English replaced Russian to become a compulsory subject in education system. Then, the awareness of people about English and the quality of English teaching grew up steadily leading to the spread of English centre in all over Vietnam (Nunan, 2003; Pham, 2006).

Although higher education went through the reform, its quality is still problematic from the official or public perspective (Pham & Fry, 2004). Recognizing these weaknesses in domestic higher education quality, the internationalization of higher education was pointed out as the solution to enhance the quality of the domestic higher education system (Tran et al., 2014). The first regulation that mentioned the expansion of internationalization of higher education was Decree no. 06/2000/ND-CP in 2000, covered the investment of foreign countries in education. The first foreign university branch campus was established in 2002, is the branch campus of Australian university - The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and is often called as RMIT Vietnam. Decree No. 18/2001/ND-CP was issued in 2001, regarding the establishment and operation of foreign educational and cultural institutions in Vietnam was the first regulation document mentioning transnational education. Following this Decree, numerous forms of transnational education in Vietnam emerged including branch campus, articulation agreement, franchising, partnership programs, dual and joint degree programs.

The need of developing education system through international cooperation was mentioned further in Resolution 14/2005/NQ-CP of the Government on “Fundamental and Comprehensive Renovation of Vietnam Higher Education for 2006-2020”. The agenda emphasized that internationalization of higher education is one of the most important approaches in renovation and integration of higher education into the global scenes. Internationalization is identified as a priority at both national and institutional levels. It is an effective tool to enhance national academic quality and standards and build up a high quality workforce for international integration process.

Joining WTO in 2007 has made a significant impact on the internationalization process of Vietnamese higher education system. Being a member of WTO, each country needs to comply with their national schedule of commitments under General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The promoting of free trade under WTO and GATS encouraged the liberation and deregulation in the education sector across borders with the belief that it will contribute to worldwide economic development. In the education sector, the market access and global competition will be promoted; barriers will be removed while cross-border movement of higher education service will be enhanced (Oliver & Nguyen, 2010). Therefore, Vietnamese higher education market must open and comply with commitments in the education service sector.

Gu (2009) and Huang (2007) agreed that WTO’s promotion has provided an international safeguard for the development of transnational education at higher education level. Hence, following the commitments on the higher education services, transnational education program blossomed in Vietnam fast since 2007. Transnational education is presented by UNESCO and Council of Europe (2001) as “all types of higher education study programs or educational services (including distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based”. With the door open to transnational education, students have more opportunities to access higher education. Alam, Alam, Chowdhury and Steiner, (2013), Chen (2015), McBurnie and Ziguras (2007), Yang (2008) and Wilkins and Huisman, (2012) described the main modes of delivery of transnational education including

(1) international branch campus, (2) articulation programs, (3) online learning and distance education programs, (4) franchising and partnership programs, (5) dual and joint degree programs. Among these modes of supply, articulation programs, franchising and partnership programs are the most favourable methods which higher education institutions adopt. For branch campus mode, RMIT Vietnam, which was established in 2002, is the only foreign branch campus until now. On the other hand, Ministry of Education and Training (2013), approved very few online learning and distance education programs and controlled them strictly because of the doubt on the quality of online programs. Articulation programs are popular in all higher education institutions since they can have freedom in choosing foreign partners and apply programs without the permission document. The Ministry of Education and Training, (2016) highly supports articulation programs and does not require higher education institutions to submit any application documents. Joint degree programs are supported by Vietnamese law since 2012. All of these programs must modify to partnership programs (the awarded degree from foreign universities) or to dual programs (the awarded degree from both foreign and domestic universities). Students enrolled in dual programs need to register at both domestic and foreign universities. Students have to learn the whole course in foreign language, pass the national university entrance exam and study required subject as a normal domestic program such as Marxist Leninist, Ho Chi Minh Vision, and Communist Party History. Since the curriculum and structure of dual programs are complicated, there are few dual programs running. Partnership program is the strongest growing form. Since the first partnership program established in 2001, until 2016, there are 436 partnership programs licensed. Compared to establishing a foreign branch campus in Vietnam, foreign partners face less difficulty in operating a higher successful chance in running the program when they collaborate with a local institution. The set-up of infrastructure, administration, application for program permit document and recruiting students are the charges of local partner while curriculum, academic performance, academic control, teaching staff and awarded degree are the tasks of foreign partner (Hang, 2015).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Globalization concept not only contains the competition between nations but also cooperation. With the expanding of globalization, the exchange and collaboration between higher education institutions inside and outside border are highly supported. Furthermore, the competition in the higher education market grew up with the appearing of private sectors and international programs. Although the number of young Vietnamese choosing to study at a higher education level is increasing, the weakness of higher education system at domestic level can not cater to the strong demand and Vietnamese universities respond slowly to market changes with outdated curricula and teaching type (Marginson et al., 2011). Students want to obtain the latest career skills and training to increase their competitiveness, especially after Vietnam joining WTO with many career opportunities for fresh graduates. Therefore, it is fuelling the number of students going abroad for high quality training and high status of the awarding institution. In 2012, 90% of Vietnamese students studied abroad as self-funded (OECD & World Bank, 2014). This pressure from students leads to the need of improving domestic educational quality and catching up with the recent advances in higher education through internationalization the Vietnamese education system and establishing transnational education programs. Hence, students are given the higher opportunity to obtain an international qualification which can facilitate them in working in different countries and cultures. Through strengthening the cooperation with overseas higher education institutions, Vietnam's higher education institutions can benefit from exchange of programs, course curriculum, students, lecturers and staff, utilizing financial, technical and equipment support to enhance the quality of their institutions.

On the other hand, some concerns are raised such as the quality of international programs, the brain drain issue, the lack of accreditation framework and the loss of national value and identity. Furthermore, the gap between the rich and the poor may enhance since more and more students from the middle class choose international programs while poorer students cannot afford the tuition fee of those programs. When international programs bring the international qualification and quality from developed countries to students, domestic programs at public institutions cannot compare to those

academic environment standards. Therefore, policy makers and practitioners should take into account the negative impacts to minimize them and enhance the positive impact of globalization.

REFERENCES

- Alam, F., Alam, Q., Chowdhury, H., & Steiner, T. (2013). Transnational education: Benefits, threats and challenges. *Procedia Engineering*, 56, 870-874.
- Altbach, P. G. (2002). Perspectives on international higher education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 34(3), 29-31.
- Altbach, P. G. (2004a). The past and future of Asian universities: Twenty-first century challenges. In Altbach P. G. & Umakoshi T. (Eds.), *Asian Universities: Historical perspectives and contemporary challenges* (pp. 13-32). Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Altbach, P. G. (2004b). Globalization and the university: Myths and realities in an unequal world. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 10(1), 3-25.
- Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. (2007). The internationalization of higher education: Motivations and realities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4), 290-305.
- Bowen K., Nguyen, B. C., & Weigl B. (1998). *Mountain river: Vietnamese poetry from the wars, 1948-1993: A bilingual collection*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Chen, P. Y. (2015). Transnational education: Trend, modes of practices and development. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 5(8), 634-637.
- General Statistics Office of Vietnam. (2016). *General statistics*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/jiJPhk>
- Gu, J. (2009). Transnational education: Current developments and policy implications. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 4(4), 624-649.
- Hang, H. T. T. (2015). The effect of capital structure on corporate performance: Evidence in Vietnam. *International Journal of Business and Administrative Studies*, 1(2), 68-77.
- Hayden, M., & Lam Q. T. (2010). Vietnam's higher education system. In Harman, G. S., Hayden, M., & Pham, T. N (Eds.), *Reforming higher education in Vietnam: Challenges and priorities* (pp. 15-30). London, UK: Springer.
- Huang, F. (2007). Internationalization of higher education in the developing and emerging countries: A focus on transnational higher education in Asia. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3-4), 421-432.
- Knight, J. (1993). Internationalization: Management strategies and issues. *International Education Magazine*, 9(6), 21-22.
- Knight, J. (1997). Internationalisation of higher education: A conceptual framework. In Knight, J., & De Wit, H. (eds.), *Internationalization of Higher Education in Asia Pacific Countries* (pp. 5-19). Amsterdam, Netherlands: European Association for International Education (EAIE).
- Lam, T. Q. (1992). Vietnam. In B. R. Clark & G. Neave (Eds). *The Encyclopaedia of Higher Education*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon Press.
- Marginson, S., Kaur, S., & Sawir, E. (2011). *Higher education in the Asia-Pacific: Strategic responses to globalization*. Heidelberg, Germany: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Marginson, S., & Van der Wende, M. (2007). *Globalisation and higher education* (OECD Education Working Papers, No. 8). Paris, France: OECD Publishing (NJ1).
- McBurnie, G., & Ziguras, C. (2007). *Transnational education: Issues and trends in offshore higher education*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Ministry of Education and Training (2013). *Higher education Statistic*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/KZMcaC>
- Ministry of Education and Training (2016). *Transnational education report*. Hanoi, Vietnam: International Higher Education Day in Vietnam.
- Nayyar, D. (2008). Globalisation: What does it mean for higher education? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42(50), 30-35.

- Ngo, T. M., Lingard, B., & Mitchell, J. (2006). The policy cycle and vernacular globalization: A case study of the creation of Vietnam National University-Hochiminh City. *Comparative Education*, 42(02), 225-242.
- Nguyen, H. T. (2007). *The impact of globalisation on higher education in China and Vietnam: Policies and practices*. In *Education in a Changing Environment Conference* (pp. 14-16), Manchester, UK: University of Salford, Manchester.
- Nunan, D. (2003). The impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific Region. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(4), 589-613.
- OECD and The World Bank. (2014). *Science, technology and innovation in Vietnam*. Paris, France: OECD Publishing.
- Oliver, D. E., & Nguyen, K. D. (2010). Global competition as a two-edged sword: Vietnam's higher education policy. In V. D. Rust, L. Portnoi & S. S. Bagley, *Higher Education, Policy, and the Global Competition Phenomenon* (pp. 127-142). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pham, H. H. (2006). Researching the research culture in English language education in Vietnam. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, 10(2), 1-20.
- Pham, L. H., & Fry, G. W. (2004). Education and economic, political, and social change in Vietnam. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 3(3), 199-222.
- Pham, L. H., & Fry, G. W. (2002). The emergence of private higher education in Vietnam: Challenges and opportunities. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 1(1-2), 127-141.
- Torres, C. A., & Schugurensky, D. (2002). The political economy of higher education in the era of neoliberal globalization: Latin America in comparative perspective. *Higher Education*, 43(4), 429-455.
- Tran, L., Marginson, S., Do, H., Do, Q., Le, T., Nguyen, N., & Nguyen, H. (2014). *Higher education in Vietnam: Flexibility, mobility and practicality in the global knowledge economy*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- UNESCO & Council of Europe (2001). *Code of good practice in the provision of transnational education*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/Hvi0E3>
- UNESCO (2015). *Education for all 2015 national review report: Vietnam*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/vFhv2i>
- Vietnam's WTO Commitments. (2016). *Vietnam's WTO commitments on services*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/2Gc9Xv>
- Wilkins, S., & Huisman, J. (2012). The international branch campus as transnational strategy in higher education. *Higher Education*, 64(5), 627-645.
- World Bank (2016). *Vietnam's overview*. Retrieved from <https://goo.gl/xapi2b>
- Yang, R. (2003). Globalisation and higher education development: A critical analysis. *International Review of Education*, 49(3-4), 269-291.
- Yang, R. (2008). Transnational higher education in China: Contexts, characteristics and concerns. *Australian Journal of Education*, 52(3), 272-286.

— This article does not have any appendix. —