

## INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THEORY TO PRACTICE

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**Abstract:** Today, with the strong development of the Digital Age, many job opportunities have been created for students, but it also brings many challenges in terms of high-quality human resources. In order to keep pace with the 4.0 era, over the past time, Vietnam's higher education institutions are promoting their advantages to soon successfully build a digital university model, innovate, and strive to improve the quality of life and increase capacity to adapt to trends in the new era. This study aims to clarify theoretical issues on innovation and survey the current status of innovation activities in some universities in Vietnam, thereby recommending solutions to prevent innovation. stop improving the quality of human resource training, meeting the increasing demands of society, and the process of international integration of Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Innovation, creativity, teaching, university, theory, practice

### Introduction

As a place to train high-quality human resources for the country, higher education in Vietnam has always been of interest to the whole society. During more than 37 years of Innovation (1986-2023), higher education has achieved significant achievements, but there are also limitations and shortcomings. Therefore, reforming the higher education system is one of the important tasks to contribute to achieving the country's development goals and international integration.

Developing qualified and high-quality human resources has been identified by the Party and State as one of the three leading strategic breakthroughs of the country, especially in the context of the knowledge economy and digital transformation going strong. To meet the urgent requirements of reality, the 8th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, term XI, passed Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW (November 4, 2013), "On fundamental and comprehensive reform of education - training, meeting the requirements of industrialization and modernization in the context of a socialist-oriented market economy and international integration". Facing the new requirements of the times, higher education needs a strong transformation and innovation. In that, university autonomy is necessary for implementing advanced university governance methods to improve training quality.

In recent years, universities have focused on building and developing strong research groups to enhance scientific research activities, and international publication as well as through the research group environment to improve the quality of the research team and quality training. From strong research groups of universities, a number of excellent laboratories and research centers have been established, which play a leading role in national science and technology

activities. In addition to the 2 National Universities, many universities have determined to develop into advanced research universities.

The Ministry of Education and Training (2020) has directed universities to actively deploy talented, advanced, and high-quality training programs to train and foster talents. Participating in these programs is excellent for Vietnam and foreign lecturers to develop and internationalize training programs to meet global human resources. In addition, Vietnam has sent thousands of young and excellent intellectuals to study abroad for university, master's, and doctorate degrees.

The 4th industrial revolution is growing faster than ever, leading to a great demand for high-quality and highly qualified human resources and creating opportunities and challenges for higher education. Therefore, Vietnam's higher education is actively transforming digitally and has a quick and appropriate industry restructuring.

### **Literature Review**

In terms of history, since the establishment of the Temple of Literature - Quoc Tu Giam (1070), higher education in Vietnam has existed for over a thousand years. The cause of higher education formed after the August Revolution (1945) has also undergone more than 78 years (1945-2023) of development. During the renovation period, our Party has consistently affirmed that education - training is the leading national policy; Investment in education is an investment in development and education must be given priority, ahead of other fields. To meet the urgent requirements of reality, the 8th Plenum of the Party Central Committee, term XI, passed Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, dated November 4, 2013, "On fundamental and comprehensive reform of education - training, meeting the requirements of industrialization and modernization in the context of a socialist-oriented market economy and international integration". Since then, the reform of higher education has been carried out in Vietnam with the goal of creating a radical and drastic change in the quality and effectiveness of education and training in order to better meet the needs of the construction and defense of the Fatherland and the learning needs of the people. The resolution also sets out a goal that by 2030, Vietnam's higher education will reach an advanced level in the region.

The need to innovate higher education in Vietnam is regulated by the country's development situation and the general trend of the world. Domestically, the doi moi process has been going on for more than 35 years and is getting deeper and deeper. The need to transform the economic model from breadth to depth and the need to restructure the economy towards quality, efficiency, and competitiveness requires higher education to meet the learning needs of people and quickly contribute to the training of high-quality human resources. Without innovation, it will lead to poor quality human resources and will be one of the factors hindering the development of the country.

Vietnam is one of the countries that actively and actively integrate into the world because it clearly sees the objectivity of this process in the development of mankind. Therefore, after coming out of the socio-economic crisis in 1996, Vietnam gradually transitioned from international economic integration to extensive and comprehensive international integration in all fields. In order to have "global citizens" who are able to compete in the world human resource market, it is imperative to renovate higher education in the direction of preserving the characteristics of higher education in the country, while maintaining an approach to the

common standards of world higher education. Thus, Vietnam's internal development needs require a strong “transformation” in higher education.

Besides, the need to change higher education also comes from the strong development of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Under the impact of this revolution, professional knowledge becomes obsolete very quickly, new knowledge and scientific information will be generated exponentially and can be stored in very compact means. In the “digitized” environment, higher education will be drastically changed from the philosophy and educational goals to the role of the teacher, from the teaching method to the “central” position of the learner. Therefore, educational innovation in general and higher education reform in particular is a global trend and Vietnam cannot be out of that trend. Currently, the competition between countries is essentially the competition for human resources and science-technology, so, after all, this is the competition for the quality of human resources, which is the most important factor determining growth opportunities.

### **Research Results**

#### **Innovating and creating higher education from a theoretical perspective**

In the view of UNESCO, higher education is a public good and an integral part of the realization of the human right to education. Therefore, higher education must be a unified system, where diversity contributes to different and flexible learning paths for young people and adults.

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to fulfill all three of their missions, spreading democratic values and principles (Hoduc, et al., 2022). These institutions must also cross the boundaries of discipline, major, perception, reputation, and type of institution. The aim is to expand educational opportunities, promote professional excellence, and nurture true citizens committed to social justice and sustainability (Hang, et al., 2020; Van, 20220).

This view is concretized into the following principles in determining the roadmap of higher education to 2030 and beyond ensuring equity, inclusion, and diversity of learners; Exercising academic freedom and the participation of all stakeholders; Promoting critical thinking, the pursuit of truth, and creativity; Uphold the spirit of integrity and ethical values; Commitment to contribute to sustainable development and social responsibility; Pursue excellence through cooperation, not competition (LongAn, et al., 2020).

Practice shows that the traditional “closed” education has revealed many weaknesses: stagnation, lack of democracy, and failure to promote individual learning abilities. Therefore, education development will ensure creativity for the construction and organization of educational content and forms of the system; create a bridge to overcome educational inequality, and promote the trend of lifelong learning for everyone, anywhere, anytime in order to move towards a learning society; make full use of resources for education and ensure the effectiveness and sustainable development of the system.

Researching the trend of creativity and innovation in the education system, scientists have summarized the open education system in the United States as follows: “Concepts about how the education system should work. Which, from kindergarten to college, is changing. The very idea of leveling, class, or rigid separation between schools and universities is now being challenged. The rapid proliferation of online learning has created unprecedented access to a wide range of academic content, laying the groundwork for an education system based on individual learning experiences and competencies. An open education system offers a

perspective of student-centered learning at all levels. At all levels of education, open education meets the needs and learning goals of students, reducing costs for taxpayers and increasing educational opportunities for all” (Association of Universities and Colleges of Vietnam, 2017). British scientists have emphasized “The radically different model of open education and the traditional university”. This is how higher education institutions participate in the expansion of open education, besides providing opportunities for experimentation, criticism, and creativity along with university establishment, open education is also a direct challenge for the future of the institution (Thiep, 2021). It is important to note that an increasing number of short- and long-term teaching and learning strategies are being adopted by university institutions as defined by one of the most ambiguous areas of academic governance (Hang, et al., 2020; Trung & Van, 2020).

Researching open education in the media breakthrough, British scientists use the term “disruption” derived from the economic theory of Karl Marx, according to which capital development occurs as a result of the creative destruction of the previous economic system (Luongngoc, et al, 2022). However, it has been argued that in today's capitalist perception, the university is a “primary space for contradictions”, where knowledge ownership, labor force production, etc., and the creation of social and cultural stratification are threatened. Therefore, high-quality tertiary education will be important to train those who have been released from unemployment in large-scale manufacturing, the service sector, and the private business sectors. by competitive innovation caused by new technologies.

The question here is whether these people need to be trained for society in the twenty-first century when there may be significant opportunities for employment. Philosopher Brian Holmes has identified the following trends in the job market: “human well-being” and related to “growth in mentoring, coaching, care, counseling, doctors, education, training, and general capacity building”, etc. to meet the needs of a world population that will reach 9 billion by 2050; and “big data management and digitization”, along with personal journalism, media, social networks, cybersecurity, information selection, etc. Maintaining social order in such circumstances, Brian Holmes argues, requires a huge pool of professional educators, artists, and thinkers who can help people “learn the way of life”, “learn to imagine, aspire and create a different collective existence”, which is different from the emphasis on “cheap production of goods like mass production, but indulged in preference prefer individual customers”. To make this work requires large investments in education, in the form of humanities, collaborative processes to maintain community and ecology, to develop a philosophy of coexistence.

### **Innovating and creating higher education from a practical perspective**

After more than 8 years of implementing the policy of innovation, higher education in Vietnam has achieved some encouraging achievements. First of all, Vietnam has gradually institutionalized the views and contents of Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW on education reform into State policies and laws. Specifically, in 2018 and 2019, the Law amending and supplementing a number of articles of the Higher Education Law (2018) and the Education Law (2019) drafted by the Ministry of Education and Training was approved by the National Assembly adopted and gradually come to life, creating a legal corridor for higher education innovation activities. Higher education institutions are spread across the country, creating conditions to improve fairness in people's access to higher education.

Regarding the governance and administration of the higher education system, Vietnam has gradually strengthened the autonomy of universities. The quality of higher education has been gradually raised and approaching international standards. In 2019, Vietnam's higher education ranked 68th out of 196 countries in the world (up 12 places compared to 2018). Inspection and quality assurance are increasingly in order. As of December 31, 2020, there were 149 higher education institutions and 9 pedagogical colleges that met the accreditation standards according to the set of criteria for accrediting the quality of higher education in Vietnam (accounting for about 55% of the total number of teachers) universities in the country), in which 7 universities have been recognized by international organizations and accreditations. In 2020, for the first time, Vietnam has 3 universities ranked in the top 1,000 best universities in the world (Vietnam National University, Hanoi; Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City, and Hanoi University of Science and Technology); eight Vietnam universities have been included in the list of leading universities in Asia.

The increase in the rankings of universities goes hand in hand with the enhancement of the quality of the teaching staff according to international standards. Previously, the recognition of professor, associate professor, and doctoral degrees was not required to have internationally published articles, in 2018 the new regulations require applicants to have international publications in the list of prestigious journals such as ISI or Scopus, etc. In 2019, the total number of Vietnam scientific articles published on the ISI/ Scopus system was 12,475 articles, ranking 49th in the world (increasing 2.7 times compared to 2015) (Linh, 2020). As of 2020, the percentage of lecturers holding the title of professor or associate professor in the entire Vietnam education system is 6%, and the percentage of lecturers with a doctorate degree is 22.7%.

In universities, the application of information technology and digital transformation is gradually deployed to serve teaching and learning. In the academic year 2020-2021, in the context of complicated and unpredictable developments of the COVID-19 epidemic, all universities have conducted online teaching, so that teaching and learning are still guaranteed quality and finished on time.

However, besides the achievements, Vietnam's higher education still has limitations. In general, higher education still lags behind other countries in the region and the world; development has not been commensurate with the requirements and tasks and has not met the learning needs of the people. The 13th Party Congress commented: "Training high-quality human resources has not met the requirements of economic and social development" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021a). The problem now is that the limitations and weaknesses must be deeply recognized so that solutions can be found to bring Vietnam's higher education to a new level.

### **Some issues to discuss**

Firstly, universities in Vietnam are often organized according to the specialized university system, such as the University of Water Resources, University of Medicine, University of Pharmacy, University of Economics and Finance, University of Foreign Trade, etc. Although it has started to open multi-disciplinary, it is still basically a specialized university. The educational program is still "much" in theory, and "less" in practice and knowledge application.

Secondly, the quality and effectiveness of education and training are still low compared to the country's socioeconomic development requirements, and lack of cohesion with the labor market. Currently, many new universities only provide what they have, not what society needs. That is one of the reasons why in 2020, Vietnam has 225,000 bachelor, engineer, and master's graduates who have not yet found a job, or accepted to do wrongly trained occupations, causing a crisis. huge waste. According to the survey results at 60 enterprises in the field of industrial services in Ho Chi Minh City on “Assessment of enterprises' satisfaction with the quality of students trained in the first year after graduation “ (the set of criteria for evaluation are theoretical knowledge, practical skills, foreign language proficiency, working style, and professional skills), only 5.4% of the total number of students participating in the survey were evaluated at a good level, 16.8% at a good level, 28.7% at a moderate level and 37.5% at bad level (LongAn, et al., 2021 & 2022).

Third, in terms of teaching methods and forms, many universities have not yet approached the “student-centered” method, the teacher still plays the leading role, the learner is still very passive, and the interaction between teachers and students is not much. The “overload” of knowledge and the constant change of curricula are also consequences of a teaching approach that favors providing specific knowledge, while this knowledge is constantly being added. Although in recent years, according to the policy of the Ministry of Education and Training, most universities have started to teach according to the credit program like in other countries around the world, however, in essence, they still have not really innovated compared to previous teaching methods, not much different from teaching methods at all levels of general education. Specifically, the initiative of students has not been promoted; methods of education, testing, and assessment are outdated and lacking in substance; ethics education, lifestyle, and work skills have not been given due attention, etc. This is an unreasonable point because the goals of general education and higher education are different. General education is about equipping students with basic knowledge and training basic qualities. Higher education is about practicing practical skills and creative thinking, teaching how to learn and how to research. Therefore, it is necessary to quickly overcome the situation of “the teacher reads, the students copy” at the current university level.

Fourth, Vietnam's higher education is relatively “closed”, which has not yet created a connection between domestic and international higher education standards. Even in the country, despite being placed under the general management of the Ministry of Education and Training, in fact, the ability to transfer knowledge between higher education institutions is still limited. Universities and majors rarely recognize each other's training results, so learners face many difficulties when transferring schools or majors. The transfer of knowledge between domestic and foreign higher education institutions is even more difficult due to differences in training objectives, contents, and methods (except for international joint programs as agreed upon in the international cooperation agreement). Currently, most countries in the world do have not recognized university degrees and certificates trained in Vietnam; Therefore, it is very difficult for Vietnam people to want to go abroad to continue studying or settling, or working. Fifth, despite recent changes, the number of international publications by universities in Vietnam is still inferior to many countries in the region. Along with the trend of international integration, the quantity and quality of works published in international scientific publications have become an important measure of the quality of higher education in countries. Vietnam

currently has about 9,000 professors and associate professors, 24,000 doctors, and more than 100,000 masters, but the number of international publications is still quite limited, and the impact index of Vietnam's scientific research works is also limited. lower than some countries in the region, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, etc.

Sixth, although university autonomy has become a major policy, the distinction between state management and governance activities in universities is still unclear. On October 24, 2014, the Government issued Decree No. 77/NQ-CP, “On piloting renovation of operation mechanism for public higher education institutions in the period 2014 - 2017”, but So far, there is still a lack of specific legal corridors for implementation. The role of school councils in universities is still lackluster; The role of State management agencies is still very large in many contents and activities of the school, such as appointing the school council president, principal, payroll, salary, and spending norms for tasks science, etc.

The limitations of higher education in Vietnam are also reflected in a number of other issues, such as the tendency to commercialize education, lack of facilities, and inadequate treatment for educators. university, etc.

### **Suggest some solutions**

First, further strengthen the autonomy and self-responsibility of universities, starting with the large, key universities. Although the Law on Education of Vietnam stipulates that universities have autonomy in 5 areas: (i) Developing programs, textbooks, and teaching plans; (ii) Organizing enrollment, training, and graduation recognition; (iii) Organizing the apparatus for the teaching process; (iv) Operate, manage and use all resources; (v) Cooperation at home and abroad, etc., but the degree of autonomy has not been specified. In order to further strengthen the autonomy and self-responsibility of universities, state agencies, directly the Ministry of Education and Training, need to renovate their management methods in the direction of acting only as an institution. the “judge”, orienting the activities of the schools in accordance with the law, creating conditions for higher education institutions to operate independently and autonomously. Enhance autonomy, at the same time, promote self-responsibility to reduce the risk of arbitrariness, loss of quality, and pursuit of immediate benefits.

Second, improve the quality of lecturers and staff working in higher education management. The quality of the higher education system is always closely linked to the quality of the teaching staff. To build and develop this team, it is necessary to have appropriate training and retraining plans and plans, and policies to attract good students to stay at the university to do teaching work. Create conditions for overseas Vietnam scientists and international experts to participate in teaching and research at domestic universities. In addition, it is necessary to have people in charge of education management with enough heart, enough scope, and enough talent to employ the right people and well solve problems arising in higher education in the spirit of democracy. Improve the regime and policy on remuneration for lecturers and educational administrators, because up to now, teaching is still a low-income profession in society. Further, strengthen the work of information and communication so that the society can understand and share the difficulties and hardships of the teaching staff and preserve the tradition of “respecting the teacher and respecting the study” of Vietnam culture.

Third, continue to promote the socialization of higher education and strengthen international cooperation and integration in higher education. Review, amend, supplement, and gradually

perfect the system of policies, laws, and regulations to encourage domestic and foreign investors to actively invest in higher education in Vietnam; encourage and create conditions for leading international universities to open training institutions in Vietnam, especially non-profit institutions. Currently, a number of foreign universities have opened branches or are affiliated with Vietnam, such as RMIT University (Australia), Vietnam - Japan University, and Swinburne University of Technology (Australia) affiliated with FPT Vietnam Corporation, Staffordshire University (UK) cooperates with British University Vietnam (BUV), etc. Besides, creating opportunities for students to participate in exchange programs or study abroad, open seminars, International seminars on university teaching expertise and methods to improve academics, and advanced teaching skills for teaching staff. Having mechanisms and policies to encourage and encourage scientists to actively publish research results in prestigious international scientific publications, considering it as a criterion for assessing the level of research completion. science of universities and lecturers.

Fourth, continue to accelerate the process of “digital transformation” in higher education. Implement effective construction of industry databases, enhance skills, and improve the quality of online teaching and online public services. Continue to effectively use the system of exchanging electronic documents and digital signatures between the Ministry of Education and Training and relevant educational institutions and individuals, etc. to reduce troublesome procedures for subjects participating in higher education activities.

### **Conclusion**

Before the new opportunity, the Education and Training sector must have a breakthrough development and stronger transformation to improve the quality of human resources and increase labor productivity. At the same time, continue to carry out fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training to train Vietnam people to develop comprehensively, have solid knowledge and skills, creative ability, and self-mastery to establish a career; develop the best potential of each individual; actively contribute to the development of the country.

In the trend that Vietnam is deepening international integration, integrating into the digital society, and digital economy, building and developing a knowledge economy, and entering the 4.0 technology revolution, supply chain disruptions, middle-income traps, etc., the role of science and technology activities, innovation, and entrepreneurship becomes increasingly important. These activities bring dual benefits to higher education institutions: both creating products with practical applications and training people with high science and technology levels. Thus, higher education institutions have an essential role in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship and proposing solutions to remove shortcomings and barriers regarding mechanisms and policies.

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