

BOOK REVIEW

20 Years of Quality Assurance in Vietnamese Higher Education: Retrospective Analysis and Trends for the Future. By Cuong Huu Nguyen and Thanh Quy Nguyen (Eds) (2025). 351 pages. ISBN: 978-981-96-6548-8 (print). Singapore: Springer. 149.99 (EUR) (hardcover)

This volume constitutes a significant contribution to the study of higher education reform in Southeast Asia. It provides both a retrospective examination of Vietnam's trajectory in quality assurance (QA) and a forward-looking analysis of its prospective directions. By situating Vietnam's experience within broader regional and global contexts, the work offers a valuable resource for academics, policymakers, and QA practitioners engaged in reforming higher education systems.

The book systematically traces the evolution of QA in Vietnam over the past two decades, documenting major achievements, persistent challenges, and critical policy developments. Particular attention is devoted to milestones such as the establishment of accreditation agencies, the progressive adoption of international standards, and the increasing institutionalization of internal QA mechanisms within universities. In addition, the volume delineates future priorities, emphasizing sustainability of policies and practice, addressing internationalization, and responsiveness to stakeholder needs. The book advances understanding of the dynamics of higher education quality assurance in Vietnam and its implications for the wider Southeast Asian region.

The volume's principal strength lies in its historical depth. The editors present a chronology of reforms initiated since the early 2000s, enabling readers to discern the incremental yet substantive progress Vietnam has achieved in institutionalizing QA. Equally noteworthy is the policy analysis, which offers a critical examination of how governmental regulations have shaped QA practices. The authors draw attention to the persistent tensions between centralized state authority and the expanding demand for institutional autonomy, a dynamic that resonates across higher education systems in the region.

The chapter on quality assurance (QA) in national and regional universities in Vietnam offers valuable insights for practitioners beyond Vietnam, elucidating the diverse modes of QA implementation across these institutional types. The section on stakeholder engagement constitutes a particularly valuable contribution for QA practitioners, as it provides a detailed examination of the extent to which stakeholder feedback is incorporated into QA processes and leveraged to enhance teaching and learning within Vietnamese universities. However, moving from feedback from satisfaction surveys to quantitative measurement of learning outcomes will be more meaningful for improving program delivery and resource assessments.

Finally, the book advances forward-looking perspectives, with its concluding chapters articulating strategies for aligning QA with digital transformation, transnational education, and graduate employability. These recommendations are particularly salient in light of the rapid and ongoing transformations confronting higher education worldwide. The final article attempts to contextualize higher education trends within the current higher education and QA realities in Vietnam (e.g., aging population, emphasis on metrics vs learning outcomes measurement, responding to evolving types of higher education delivery, variable resources and capability across Vietnam universities, QA compliance vs QA culture, etc.). Scenarios for the future of QA in Vietnam's higher education are presented.

The scholarly contribution of this volume is considerable. It addresses a notable gap in the literature by providing the first comprehensive retrospective on quality assurance (QA) in Vietnam, a

context frequently marginalized in comparative higher education research. The integration of policy analysis, case studies, and statistical evidence enhances the methodological rigor of the book's chapters and lends credibility to its conclusions.

The volume adopts a predominantly inward-looking perspective. A more extensive comparative analysis of Vietnam's higher education quality assurance (QA) policies and practices vis-à-vis those of other ASEAN systems would substantially enhance the value of the studies presented. Such comparisons could be conducted at multiple levels—broadly across countries, universities, or programs, and more specifically at the level of academic processes and QA best practices.

While this book addresses many aspects of quality assurance, the specific effects of QA processes on degree programs and higher education remain underexplored. This volume does not examine the issue in depth, likely because universities are still preoccupied with meeting mandated QA requirements and adapting to rapid changes in higher education both locally and globally. Nevertheless, research into the impact of quality assurance on Vietnam's higher education system is needed in order to strengthen existing practices and ensure their relevance in an evolving academic landscape.

The relatively fast integration of quality assurance into Vietnam's higher education system has been largely state-driven, with laws and policies established from the outset to guide its development. As universities have reached a greater level of maturity in their QA practices and global trends in higher education continue to evolve, the imperative to reassess and recalibrate state policies has become increasingly salient. A central challenge moving forward will be achieving an appropriate balance between institutional autonomy, the allocation of resources—both financial and human—and the delivery of educational outcomes that prioritize learner-centered approaches. Over the past two decades, the volume systematically documents and analyzes these reference points, thereby providing a foundation for ongoing reforms and future projections.

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