



## IMPACT OF THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS ON QUALITY ENHANCEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF VIETNAM

**Phuong-Tam  
Pham<sup>1</sup>**

**Tran-Binh  
Duong<sup>2+</sup>**

**Thi-Thuy-Trang  
Phan<sup>3</sup>**

**Thai-Huu Nguyen<sup>4</sup>**

**Minh-Thanh  
Nguyen<sup>5</sup>**

**Manh-Tuan  
Nguyen<sup>6</sup>**

**Ngoc-Anh Hoang<sup>7</sup>**

**Van-Thai-Binh  
Nguyen<sup>8</sup>**

**Tien-Trung  
Nguyen<sup>9</sup>**

<sup>1,4,5</sup>Can Tho University, Cantho, Vietnam.

<sup>1</sup>Email: [pptam@ctu.edu.vn](mailto:pptam@ctu.edu.vn) Tel: +840903131757

<sup>4</sup>Email: [nihuu@ctu.edu.vn](mailto:nihuu@ctu.edu.vn) Tel: +84949256695

<sup>5</sup>Email: [mttp@ctu.edu.vn](mailto:mttp@ctu.edu.vn) Tel: +84932777086

<sup>2</sup>Department of Education and Training of Go Vap District, Hochiminh City, Vietnam.

<sup>3</sup>Email: [duongtranbinh@gmail.com](mailto:duongtranbinh@gmail.com) Tel: +84909270764

<sup>3</sup>Can Tho Vocational College, Cantho, Vietnam.

<sup>4</sup>Email: [pittrang@ctvc.edu.vn](mailto:pittrang@ctvc.edu.vn) Tel: +84858837777

<sup>6</sup>Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi, Vietnam.

<sup>5</sup>Email: [nguyenmanhtuan@hnu.edu.vn](mailto:nguyenmanhtuan@hnu.edu.vn) Tel: +84903292023

<sup>5</sup>Email: [binhvt@gmail.com](mailto:binhvt@gmail.com) Tel: +84903632001

<sup>7</sup>Tay Bac University, Son La, Vietnam.

<sup>7</sup>Email: [hoangngocanh@utb.edu.vn](mailto:hoangngocanh@utb.edu.vn) Tel: +84912655243

<sup>9</sup>Vietnam Journal of Education; Institute of Theoretical and Applied Research, Duy Tan University, Vietnam.

<sup>9</sup>Email: [ntt.vje@gmail.com](mailto:ntt.vje@gmail.com) Tel: +84982929468



(+ Corresponding author)

### ABSTRACT

#### Article History

Received: 22 May 2020

Revised: 6 July 2020

Accepted: 7 August 2020

Published: 17 August 2020

#### Keywords

Accreditation  
Higher education  
Impact  
Quality assurance  
Self-assessment  
Vietnam.

Quality assurance and accreditation has been implemented in Vietnam for nearly twenty years. It is mandatory for all Vietnamese higher education institutions to undertake accreditation including self-assessment. This study aims to investigate the impact of the self-assessment processes on quality enhancement of universities in Vietnam. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 33 participants from three Vietnamese universities located in three major regions: the North, the Central and the South. The interviewees were those who directly involved in the self-assessment processes including institutional leaders, department heads, faculty deans, internal quality assurance staff and lecturers. Thematic analysis identified that there was a number of notable impacts resulting from the implementation of self-assessment on higher education quality. Key impacts were reported in relation to: leadership and management, teaching staff, students and student support, and training programs. The study concludes that self-assessment processes had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching, learning, program management and student support in Vietnamese universities sampled for the current study.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study is one of the first studies to highlight key stakeholders' viewpoints about the implementation of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. It points out how self-assessment processes made positive impacts to improve the quality of teaching, learning, management, and student support in the Vietnamese universities.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Quality in higher education has been of significant concern globally in recent decades. Consequently, quality

assurance models have been implemented in most of higher education systems across the world (UNESCO, 2006; Wilger, 1997; Woodhouse, 1999). There seems to be no doubt about the purpose of quality assurance in general and self-assessment in particular as means to enhance quality in higher education in developed countries. However, it remains a question whether or not self-assessment as a key step of quality assurance processes results in quality improvement in universities in developing countries as well (Nguyen & Ta, 2018). As a developing country in the Southeast Asia, Vietnam started implementing quality assurance and accreditation at the national level in 2003, which is considered quite late when compared with other countries in the region (Nguyen, Evers, & Marshall, 2017; Nguyen, Oliver, & Priddy, 2009; Nhan & Nguyen, 2018). Moreover, to date, only a very small number of higher education programs have satisfied the quality standards requirements and received accreditation according to the regulations of the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (Nguyen, Nguyen, Tran, Do, & Vu, 2019).

There have been several studies on the impact of quality assurance and accreditation on higher education institutions in Vietnam. For example, Nguyen and Ta (2018) point out that accreditation has positive impacts on the management of program, teaching activity, lecturers and supporting staff, learners and learner support, and facility management in a national university. In addition, Nguyen (2017) studied the impact of international accreditation on the emerging quality assurance system of Vietnam and concluded that quality assurance made good changes in students' learning, teacher development, program higher education institutions, and capacity building of the quality assurance system. However, Pham (2018) argues that the accreditation process is burdensome, time- and cost-consuming, and there are no major changes in the institution after accreditation. There is little evidence to know whether quality assurance and accreditation create positive or negative impact since research on self-assessment process, which is the primary stage of quality assurance mechanism, is quite limited (Nguyen, Nguyen, Tran, & Nguyen, 2020). In order to fill this research gap, the current study explores voices of key players undertaking self-assessment activities in Vietnamese universities. The main research question addressed in this study is: "What impact has self-assessment processes made on the university?"

The study contributes to understanding the impact of self-assessment processes on higher education institutions in developing countries.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Accreditation Process

Accreditation is one of the most popular quality assurance mechanism (Woodhouse, 1999). Historically, accreditation in higher education originated from the United States of America over 100 years ago and is defined as "a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement (Eaton, 2015). According to Kis (2005) accreditation is an evaluation of an institution or a program to assess whether it meets a threshold standard and qualifies for a certain rank or status. There are two main types of accreditation: institutional accreditation and program accreditation. The result of accreditation process is usually awarding of a status of a yes or no decision of recognition and a licence or an accreditation certificate for a time-limited validity (Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, & Pârlea, 2007).

The role of accreditation in higher education is to help ensure a level of acceptable quality across the wide array of programs and institutions in higher education. Accreditation serves following purposes:

- To assess the quality of academic programs at institutions of higher education.
- To create a culture of continuous improvement of academic quality at colleges and universities and stimulate a general raising of standards among educational institutions.
- To involve the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning.
- To establish criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation (Hegji, 2017).

The accreditation process generally involves three main steps including a self-assessment process, a site visit and an examination by the accreditation board or commission. The self-assessment process is conducted by teachers, administrators and staff of the higher education institution or the academic program. The result of this process is a self-assessment report that is developed based on a set of standards and criteria of the accrediting agency. The site visit is conducted by a team of experts or peers selected by the accrediting agency. This expert team reviews the evidence, visits the premises and interviews academic staff, supporting staff, administrative staff, students, alumni and even the employees. The result of this process is an assessment report including recommendations to the institution. In the final step, the commission of the accrediting body examines evidence of both the self-assessment report and external assessment report. The result of this process is a decision of whether the institution or programs should be accredited or not (Vlăsceanu et al., 2007).

## 2.2. Self-Assessment Process

Self-assessment is the first step of any accreditation process, without which the other steps of the accreditation process cannot be proceeded (Hamadneh, 2017). Self-assessment which is also known as self-evaluation, self-study and self-analysis defined as “a process of critically reviewing the quality of one’s own performance and provision” (Harvey 2004). Self-assessment is a collective institutional reflection and an opportunity for quality improvement. According to Eaton (2015) during the self-assessment process, higher education institutions or programs prepare a written summary of their performance, based on the standards and criteria of the contracted accreditation agency. Generally, the process of self-assessment consists of a systematic collection of administrative data, the questioning of students and graduates, and holding of interviews with students and teachers, resulting in a Self-Assessment Report. The Self-Assessment Report provides significant information for the review team in charge of the external assessment (Vlăsceanu et al., 2007).

There are several strategies and approaches for self-assessment. One type is the survey approach which means a questionnaire is administered to lecturers, supporting staff and students of a higher education institution. The data are collected on the standards and criteria upon which accreditation should be granted. The guided self-assessment is another strategy which involves structured workshops during which data are collected on all units of the institution. Another approach known as assessment team approach is carried out by a small team of staff, especially selected and trained as internal assessors, who collect data and prepare a detailed report on the institution. This is a kind of structured self-assessment approach which calls for active involvement of senior management in order to collect objective data on the current state of the institution. When using this self-assessment strategy, one person should be appointed to coordinate and lead the self-assessment process until the preparation of the self-assessment report. If the self-assessment involves the whole institution, the coordinator should be the leader of the institution (for example, the university president or vice president). If the self-assessment is of a single department or program, the dean of the faculty can be a good choice (LH Martin/INQAAHE, 2011).

In summary, self-assessment is the most significant part of the accreditation process. It must be comprehensive, encompass the entire institution, and address the standards and criteria of the relevant accreditation agency. Self-assessment can also be viewed as an ongoing process to understand, evaluate, and improve quality and effectiveness by:

- Analyzing institutional resources and their effectiveness in fulfilling its mission.
- Demonstrating that students’ achievement is commensurate with the certificates, diplomas, degrees, or other recognition awarded.
- Appraising the relationship of all the institution’s activities with its purposes.
- Providing a sound basis for institutional planning and improvement.

- Assessing educational achievements as well as structures and processes.
- Assessing students' achievement with respect to programs and services offered to accomplish educational purposes.
- Assessing performance in achieving institutional mission and goals (NWCCU, 2020).

The self-assessment process consists of six steps: (1) establishing the self-assessment committee, (2) developing the self-assessment plan, (3) collecting and analyzing evidence and information, (4) preparing the self-assessment report, (5) archiving the self-assessment report, and (6) undertaking follow-ups after having completed the self-assessment process (MOET, 2017).

### *2.3. Impact of Quality Assurance and Self-Assessment*

There are many studies showing evidence of positive impact of quality assurance in general and self-assessment in particular. For example, Godwin (2011) studied the impact of program accreditation in Ghana using qualitative methods. Godwin studied the related documentation of the accrediting agency in Ghana - National Accreditation Board (NAB) and conducted in-depth interviews with the key staff of NAB and that of three universities. The study concluded that the accreditation process in Ghana had a significant impact on the quality of higher education. This resulted from action plans which the three universities had taken for areas requiring improvements in the external assessment report before applying for re-evaluation. This is evident in most re-accreditation reports where the quality of academic programs improves in the second round of assessment. Furthermore, in Latin America, evidence of a cultural change was found in Chile as a result of quality assurance (Silva, Reich, & Gallegos, 1997). Additionally, in their research, Gerbic and Kranenburg (2003) argued that external quality auditing in New Zealand had positive impact on the development of new programs. The accreditation requirements include details about the teaching philosophy of the program, its structure, details of individual courses, sequence of learning, teaching and learning methodologies, assessment methods, and support services for students. Besides, the involvement of industry and academic stakeholders in a panel process is also required to make programs more responsive to academic and professional discourses.

However, several other studies found negative impact of quality assurance, or there are instances in which the process was considered contrary to academic cultures. Specifically, the processes of external quality audits were often found to be overlapping and burdensome (Harvey, 2005) or to be bureaucratic and time-consuming (Cheng, 2009). In England, academics perceived external evaluations providing a check on standards (Harvey & Newton, 2004) or creating a tension between professional values and the auditing process (Cheng, 2009; Harvey & Newton, 2004). Particularly, Cheng (2009) found that the tension is caused by the academics' notion that "the audit is a symbol of distrust in the professionalism of academics" (p. 193). In addition, Horsburgh (1999) analyzed the determinants of improvement in learning and teaching, showing the tenuous link between external quality assurance and student learning. She argued that no linkages were found between the outcomes of external reviews and the complexity of a program, and that reviews were not concerned with issues such as leadership or the culture in which students learned. According to her, social, economic, political, and personal contexts influence students powerfully, and a quality assurance mechanism, if aiming at enhancing student learning, is required to place its emphasis on curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment.

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research was undertaken using a qualitative method with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. It involved the use and collection of a variety of empirical materials such as case studies, personal experiences, life stories, interviews, observations, and visual texts. These data describe routine and problematic moments and meanings of individuals' lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). "Qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore" (Creswell, 2012). The semi-structured interview is one of the most popular data collection instruments in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents have to answer pre-set open-ended questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Focus groups are another widely used qualitative research method. A focus group is "an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic" (Patton, 2015 p. 475). Additionally, this research employed purposive sampling to collect data. Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. This sampling method involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015).

In the current study, the researchers collected semi-structured interview data from 33 participants working at three universities in Vietnam. One focus group discussion with eight participants was undertaken at each university after the interviews. Focus group discussions were used to triangulate the findings of the interviews. For purposive sampling, the searchers selected these three universities located in three different regions of Vietnam: the North, the Central and the South. Among these three institutions, there are two public universities and one private university. The researchers also selected interviewees who were directly involved in the self-assessment processes of program accreditation. These participants were working at different positions including university leaders, department heads, faculty deans/vice deans, institutional quality assurance staff, and lecturers (Table 1).

**Table-1.** Informants participating in interviews.

Position	Responsibilities	Number
University president/ vice president	- Chairman of the Self-Assessment Committee - Approving self-assessment activities	3
Department head/ Faculty dean/vice dean	- Team leader of the Self-Assessment Committee - Supervising self-assessment activities in the team	9
Institutional quality assurance staff	- Team leader assistant of the Self-Assessment Committee - Planning self-assessment activities - Supporting lecturers in self-assessment implementation	9
Lecturers	- Members of the Self-Assessment Committee - Conducting self-assessment activities	12

To process the data collection, the researchers first sent invitations to potential participants. With their agreement and time availability, all the interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in participants' offices in the Vietnamese language, the mother tongue of both researchers and informants. Interviews lasted for 40 to 55 minutes while focus group discussions lasted around 120 minutes. All the interviews and focus group discussions were recorded in a smart phone. The researchers also took notes during the process of interviewing. Interviews and focus group discussions were then transcribed in full and put into NVIVO Version 11 for data analysis. Using thematic approach, the researchers identified themes and sub-themes emerged from the qualitative data. The keywords were impact, self-assessment, leadership and management, teaching staff, students and student support, and training programs. The theme was impact of self-assessment and the sub-themes were impact on leadership and management, impact on teaching staff, impact on students and student support and impact on training programs.

Additionally, “member checking” was rigorously applied as a means of ensuring credibility in this study. The participants were provided with numerous opportunities to confirm the findings emerging from the investigation. For example, they were invited to validate the authenticity of the interview or focus group discussion transcripts.

## 4. RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1. Impact on Leadership and Management

Most of the participants pointed out that one of the most significant impact that self-assessment processes created was the awareness amongst the universities’ leaders and managers. All the three institutional leaders admitted that they comprehended the importance of quality assurance and assessment. For example, one university president stated: *“The self-assessment process helped contribute in improving management competence and expertise for me and other managerial officials in our university”*. Furthermore, one vice president serving as the chairman of the self-assessment committee considered self-assessment as an effective strategy for quality enhancement of teaching, learning and management activities.

Having a good awareness of quality assurance and quality management practices, all sampled universities had arranged all functions and organizational structures of their units in the direction of standardization to avoid any overlapping. One head of the personnel department shared that they renamed three departments to describe their responsibilities and functions more accurately. One head of the quality assurance unit reported: *“In our university, we merged several units to ensure the effectiveness of management. Together, we revised or developed new regulation documents for the whole institution as well as the departments”*.

One of the major impacts observed in the sampled universities was the establishment of a body in charge of institutional quality assurance in general which acted as a focal point of the self-assessment process. All these universities had been practicing this quality assessment system for about a decade. For instance, the university located in the North had set up Department of Testing and Quality Assessment consisting of seven staff members about nine years ago. The university in the Central part had established the Centre for Quality Assurance with four staff members five years ago. The university in the South too had established the Office of Inspection, Testing and Quality Management with six staff members seven years ago. Even though they have different names, the quality assurance units share common duties such as supporting the university to implement quality assurance programs, especially self-assessment activities; developing self-assessment and quality assurance guidelines; and organising workshops related to quality and quality assurance for the institution.

Additionally, informants reported that due to the self-assessment processes, their university’s missions, purposes and visions was developed and revised. For example, one of the heads of academic affairs shared that the mission and vision of their university were redefined to adhere to the institutional functions, duties and its resources as well as national socio-economic development strategies. This interviewee further noted: *“Our University’s mission and vision have also been publically announced to all staff members, lecturers and learners”*.

### 4.2. Impact on Teaching Staff

The implementation of self-assessment processes created good impact on teaching and supporting staff of the researched universities. Interview participants reported that their institutions organized many workshops on quality assurance and self-assessment for teachers and staff members. It was these workshops that provided teaching and supporting staff with information and knowledge in educational quality, quality assurance and self-assessment. One senior lecturer shared: *“Through those workshops we have developed our awareness of the significance of self-assessment in teaching quality as well as our role in self-assessment processes.”*

Another teacher stated that due to the self-assessment processes, the university could organize professional development programs. The knowledge and skills gained from such workshops helped Faculty prepare their lesson plans more efficiently and effectively. They also implemented several new teaching and assessment methods. This

teacher noted: *“Our University invited both local and foreign experts in teaching methodology to train us. All colleagues learnt a lot from them and gradually changed our methods of teaching and assessment.”*

During the self-assessment processes, teachers were evaluated for their teaching performance by students. This is a big change that self-assessment activity made an impact on teachers' viewpoints. One senior lecturer shared: *“When I was told by the university president that I would be evaluated by my students, I was shocked and felt angry. You know, in our country's culture, teachers are always respected by students, students' parents and even the whole society. Therefore, my students will have no right to evaluate me. But through his explanation and talking with other teachers, I understood that the evaluation was good to help improve my teaching methods.”*

#### *4.3. Impact on Students and Student Support*

Informants reported that during the self-assessment processes, the university organized several workshops on quality assurance for students to provide them with basic knowledge of self-assessment and quality management. Consequently, students were aware of their role in the accreditation process in general and the self-assessment process in particular. One institutional quality assurance staff shared: *“Our students showed good responsibilities when they participated in feedback surveys to evaluate lecturers and student support services as they knew that their voices would be heard. They also understand that students' viewpoints would contribute to improve the quality of teaching and other learning activities.”*

Furthermore, self-assessment processes resulted in better services and facilities for students. Informants reported that their students were supplied with better infrastructure and equipment for learning; they got a better community feeling and more opportunities for sports and arts. One head of student affairs department shared that his university had just opened a new multiple function sports building which attracted hundreds of students every day to come and practice. One dean stated that their university now often organized job fairs and forums with employers and businesses to help students find jobs. This interviewee further added: *“Thanks to these activities [job fair and forums], many of our students were employed even before they graduated.”*

Additionally, many participants mentioned student support activities in the forms of tuition fee waivers for disadvantaged students and scholarships for meritorious students. One teacher reported that in the current academic year nearly 500 students from poor families or remote areas received fee waivers. Another teacher stated that in their institution two best students in each program were awarded merit scholarship equal to full tuition fee for one semester.

Healthcare for students was also reported by many informants. One teacher stated that during the orientation week, all the new students were checked for their health. Another teacher shared: *“Healthcare for student is one of the priorities in our university. We have three healthcare workers who perform medical examination for students and staff.”*

#### *4.4. Impact on Training Programs*

A series of training workshops were conducted during the self-assessment processes that made faculty and other staff familiar with several aspects related to teaching and assessment. A major impact of such training programs about self-assessment was on curriculum development, as reported by some informants. It was stated that not only lecturers but educational managers, educators, alumni and employers were involved in developing the curricula. They also shared that the curricula since then was being reviewed and revised periodically based on benchmarking with local and international programs and feedback from alumni, educational agencies and employers. The informants also mentioned about the implementation of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework when they designed and operated their curricula. One teacher shared: *“As part of the self-assessment processes, we invited an international expert to train us how to apply OBE approach in developing curricula. I think it is an advanced approach. However, it was quite difficult for us to follow. We had to change many things.”*

Another teacher noted that their university also implemented the OBE approach. It took them almost three years to transfer from the traditional curriculum development approach to OBE one.

Apart from curriculum development, informants also reported innovation in teaching techniques and assessment methods. They said that training workshops during the self-assessment processes provided them with a variety of teaching modes and assessment tools. One senior teacher shared: "I always think that my teaching methods are excellent and I have no reasons to change them. In fact, some modern teaching modes such as those using technology can make students more interested in our lessons." Another teacher pointed out the new assessment methods that she now used after the training: "Last semester I gave my students group projects. They needed to divide the work among all group members and decide what they were going to do. They then would design the tool and collect data. Finally, they wrote a report and presented the results in the classroom. It is a good way of assessing students' knowledge and skills."

During the training activities, the several lecturers, administrative staff, supporting staff and students from the sampled universities participated in surveys that were conducted to judge about the quality of academic programs. Many informants stated that surveys were good channels for them to evaluate the academic programs, amenities and facilities and supporting services. Moreover, they also received feedback from their colleagues and students on their teaching performance. One teacher shared: "There are several kinds of evaluation in our university such as program evaluation, teacher evaluation, and student support evaluation. Results of these evaluations help us improve the quality of the whole institution."

## 5. DISCUSSION

The research findings highlighted positive impact of self-assessment processes in three higher education institutions in Vietnam sampled for the current study. The areas where impact was reported as a result of self-assessment implementation included leadership and management, teaching staff, students and student support services, and training programs. These findings are consistent with [Nguyen and Ta \(2018\)](#) where they explored the impact of accreditation in a key university of national level. Besides these areas mentioned above, [Nguyen and Ta \(2018\)](#) pointed out that quality assurance processes also had good influence on supporting staff and facility management. Furthermore, when universities cooperate with overseas accreditation agencies to conduct self-assessment, the impact can be observed on the whole institution and the capacity building of its quality assurance system ([Nguyen, 2017](#)).

One of the most significant impacts during the process of self-assessment implementation was that on leadership and management. The institutional leaders and administrators are among the first to get aware of the importance of quality assurance and self-assessment ([Nguyen, 2017](#)). The president or vice president of the three universities in this study expressed their understanding of the role of self-assessment for institutional quality enhancement. They admitted that they restructured several units of their university for the effectiveness of management and/or established a body specializing in quality assurance. This follows the regulations of the Vietnamese government that all universities need to establish and develop their internal quality assurance system ([National Assembly, 2018](#)). In addition, these leaders of the sampled universities paid great attention to the development, revision and announcement of their institution's mission, vision and objectives. This impact is seen in compliance with the government's regulations that all higher education institution should revise and improve their mission, vision and objectives for the satisfaction of relevant stakeholders ([MOET, 2017](#)).

The self-assessment process also resulted in professional competence enhancement for teaching staff. The current study showed that the three universities organized training workshops in innovation of teaching and assessment for lecturers. By participating in these workshops and entering into dialogues with trainers and foreign experts, teachers' professional knowledge and skills largely improved. Many informant lecturers shared that they applied new teaching methods and assessment instruments during the self-assessment implementation. These



findings echo the study by (Nguyen 2019) who suggested professional development activities for teachers that can change their ways of teaching for student effectiveness. Moreover, the self-assessment process made teachers' viewpoints change. Specifically, they accepted students' evaluation of their teaching performance, which had rarely been done previously due to the oriental culture. This also confirms (Nguyen & Ta, 2018) finding that students' survey about their teachers' teaching and assessment methods constituted a significant change in Vietnamese education.

Previous studies have pointed out that students also should be a part of the self-assessment process since student involvement in quality assurance process is a widespread practice in many countries across the world. Students could be involved at various levels: in the self-assessment process at institutional level; in the quality assurance process at national level; and at internal level or external level in the universities (Elassy, 2013). There is no doubt that students should be involved and they play a significant role in the quality assurance process in general and in self-assessment process in particular (Scott, 2018). The current research findings support the previous studies as it was evident in the sampled universities that students were provided with knowledge about quality assurance and self-assessment through workshops and seminars. Consequently, they became aware of their role in the processes of quality assurance and self-assessment. Additionally, they also actively participated in surveys to evaluate their teachers' performance and student support services.

The findings from the current study also reveal that training programs made a great impact on self-assessment. The first impact was on the curriculum development where trainee informants admitted that they started revision of curricula periodically after the training, based on feedback from lecturers, students, graduates and employers. This finding confirms that of Nguyen (2017) and Nguyen and Ta (2018) who also discussed the revision of programs as the result of quality assurance implementation. However, the finding differ from that of Pham (2018) who observed limited improvement in programs and argued that quality accreditation was unable to help the university to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The findings of Pham (2018) also differ in reporting the impact of accreditation on only one section of employees, i.e. managers at institutional and functional unit levels and only in a single university located in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. The current research however investigated this impact of self-assessment on three universities in different regions of Vietnam and sampled informants holding different positions including institutional leaders, middle level management officials (department heads, faculty deans), institutional quality assurance staff members and lecturers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Self-assessment, as a key step of quality assurance process, plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of teaching, learning and academic management. By law, all higher education institutions in Vietnam have to undertake self-assessment, improve training quality and apply for institutional and program accreditation (National Assembly, 2018; Nguyen 2018). Until the end of February 2020, 95% of all Vietnamese universities (225/237) had completed their self-assessment reports and submitted for accreditation (MOET, 2020). Studies on quality assurance and accreditation processes in Vietnamese universities have shown both positive and negative impact. Specifically, the accreditation process has contributed in improving the quality of program management, teaching activities, lecturers and supporting staff, learners and learner support, and facility (Nguyen & Ta, 2018). Though a few other studies have argued the accreditation process as a burden and less effective in implementing quality assurance (Pham, 2018, 2019).

Key findings from this research confirm positive impacts of quality assurance in general and self-assessment process in particular. The self-assessment process resulted in quality enhancement of leadership and management, teaching staff, students and student support, and training programs among selected Vietnamese higher education institutions. However, these findings were only observed from three Vietnamese universities sampled for the current study. It is recommended that future research employ large-scale studies to triangulate research findings.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Acknowledgement:** All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

## REFERENCES

- Cheng, M. (2009). Academics' professionalism and quality mechanisms: Challenges and tensions. *Quality in Higher Education*, 15(3), 193–205. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320903343008>.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). London: Pearson.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction. The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & S. L. Yvonna (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 1–45). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Eaton, J. (2015). *An overview of U.S accreditation*. Washington D.C: Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).
- Elassy, N. (2013). A model of student involvement in the quality assurance system at institutional level. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 21(2), 162–198. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/09684881311310692>.
- Gerbic, P., & Kranenburg, I. (2003). The impact of external approval processes on program development. *Quality in Higher Education*, 9(2), 169–177.
- Godwin, U. (2011). Demonstrating quality: Evaluation of institutional and program accreditation in Ghana. *International Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, 3(8), 135–142.
- Hamadne, H. S. (2017). The constraints to the application of self-assessment of the academic programs at Al-Balqa Applied University from the Viewpoint of the Faculty Members. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(14), 112–117.
- Harvey, L. (2005). A history and critique of quality evaluation in the UK. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 136–167(4), 136–167.
- Harvey, L., & Newton, J. (2004). Transforming quality evaluation. *Quality in Higher Education*, 10(2), 149–165.
- Harvey, L. (2004). Analytic quality glossary. Retrieved from: <http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/>.
- Hegji, A. (2017). *An overview of accreditation of higher education in the United States*. Washington D.C: Congressional Research Service.
- Horsburgh, M. (1999). Quality monitoring in higher education: The impact on student learning. *Quality in Higher Education*, 5(1), 9–25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1353832990050102>.
- Kis, V. (2005). *Quality assurance in tertiary education: Current practices in OECD countries and a literature review on potential effects*. Paris: OECD.
- LH Martin/INQAAHE. (2011). Methods of review and accreditation: Self-assessment in EQA. Retrieved from: [https://www.inqahe.org/sites/default/files/1317654483\\_2-4-self-assessment-in-eqa.pdf](https://www.inqahe.org/sites/default/files/1317654483_2-4-self-assessment-in-eqa.pdf).
- MOET. (2017). *Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDDT dated 19/5/2017 on regulations for accreditation of higher education institutions*. Hanoi: MOET.
- MOET. (2020). *List of higher education institutions and teacher training colleges that have completed the self-assessment reports (until 29/02/2020)*. Hanoi: MOET.
- National Assembly. (2018). *Law on amending, supplementing a number of articles of the higher education law*. Hanoi: National Assembly.
- Nguyen, C. H., Nguyen, L. T. M., Tran, T., & Nguyen, T.-T. (2020). Bibliographic and content analysis of articles on education from Vietnam indexed in Scopus from 2009 to 2018. *Science Editing*, 7(1), 45–49. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.6087/kcse.188>.
- Nguyen, H. C. (2017). Impact of international accreditation on the emerging quality assurance system: The Vietnamese experience. *Change Management: An International Journal*, 17(3), 1–9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-798x/cgp/v17i03/1-9>.

- Nguyen, H. C. (2018). How to fulfil Vietnam's higher education accreditation strategic plan 2017–2020. *International Journal of Educational Organization and Leadership*, 24(3/4), 17-25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18848/2329-1656/cgp/v24i03/17-25>.
- Nguyen, H. C. (2019). An investigation of professional development among educational policy-makers, institutional leaders and teachers. *Management in Education*, 33(1), 32-36. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020618781678>.
- Nguyen, H. C., Evers, C., & Marshall, S. (2017). Accreditation of Viet Nam's higher education: Achievements and challenges after a dozen years of development. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 25(4), 475–488. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-11-2016-0075>.
- Nguyen, H. C., & Ta, T. T. H. (2018). Exploring impact of accreditation on higher education in developing countries: a Vietnamese view. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 24(2), 154–167. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2017.1406001>.
- Nguyen, K. D., Oliver, D. E., & Priddy, L. E. (2009). Criteria for accreditation in Vietnam's higher education: Focus on input or outcome? *Quality in Higher Education* 15(2), 123–134. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320902995766>.
- Nguyen, N. V., Nguyen, T. T., Tran, V. C., Do, T. T., & Vu, C. T. (2019). Quality management of higher education programs in Vietnam: results from program accreditation. *Journal of Management Information and Decision Sciences*, 22(4), 507-514.
- Nhan, T. T., & Nguyen, H. C. (2018). Quality challenges in transnational higher education under profit-driven motives: The Vietnamese experience. *Issues in Educational Research*, 28(1), 138-152.
- NWCCU. (2020). *Handbook of accreditation*. Redmond, WA: NWCCU.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Pham, H. T. (2018). Impacts of higher education quality accreditation: A case study in Vietnam. *Quality in Higher Education* 24(2), 168–185. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2018.1491787>.
- Pham, H. T. (2019). Limited legitimacy among academics of centrally driven approaches to internal quality assurance in Vietnam. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 41(2), 172–185. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2019.1565298>.
- Scott, E. A. (2018). *Student involvement in the quality assurance processes in HE in FE: Perceptions of students, teachers and managers*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Silva, M., Reich, R., & Gallegos, G. (1997). Effects of external quality evaluation in Chile: A preliminary study. *Quality in Higher Education*, 3(1), 27–35.
- UNESCO. (2006). *External quality assurance: Options for higher education managers*. Paris: UNESCO.
- Vlăsceanu, L., Grünberg, L., & Pârlea, D. (2007). *Quality assurance and accreditation: A glossary of basic terms and definitions*. Bucharest: UNESCO.
- Wilger, A. (1997). *Quality assurance in higher education: A literature review*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.
- Woodhouse, D. (1999). Quality and quality assurance. In OECD (Ed.), *Quality and internationalisation in higher education* (pp. 29–43). Paris: OECD.

*Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of Education and Practice shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.*