

Ensuring Educational Quality in the Context of Autonomous University

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring the quality of education is considered a crucial condition for empowering autonomy in higher education institutions, reflecting the commitment to quality and accountability to stakeholders. The University of Labour and Social Affairs always prioritizes ensuring and enhancing quality in all aspects as a top priority in its development strategy, as a continuous and systematic process. Based on practical experience in ensuring the quality of education, the University of Labour and Social Affairs has achieved accreditation for the second cycle and 08 undergraduate training programs according to national standards/ministry of education and training. The article delves into analyzing the current situation of quality assurance and accreditation at the University of Labour and Social Affairs in the past period. Additionally, it proposes solutions to enhance quality, suggests quality indicators to monitor and supervise the achieved results to ensure the quality objectives of higher education institutions, as well as makes recommendations for adjusting and improving relevant legal documents to enhance the effectiveness and role of educational quality accreditation work.

Keywords: Quality assurance, quality accreditation, university autonomy.

I. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Domestic and world higher education has been changing rapidly with many new development trends, contributing to promoting the commercialization of higher education in many developed countries. In particular, the fourth industrial revolution is changing the world dramatically in many aspects with outstanding achievements in the fields of: Internet of things, social networks, big data, artificial intelligence and robots, ... this trend has greatly changed the labor structure, thereby forming new training occupations and transforming traditional training

occupations. Evaluation standards for universities are increasingly being internationalized, in which many university ranking and accreditation organizations around the world have been established and are widely recognized by countries. Faced with the new context, the Ministry of Education and Training has directed universities to implement fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training towards a modern education with international integration towards innovation. teaching, testing and assessment methods; develop a team of lecturers and management staff; Build each school's own brand to attract learners. Especially to meet the increasing needs of the labor market. Therefore, educational quality assurance activities are considered an important condition and basis for granting autonomy to higher education institutions, while also demonstrating commitment to quality and accountability for higher education institutions. related parties.

II. CURRENT SITUATION OF ENSURING AND ASSESSING EDUCATION QUALITY AT THE LABOUR - SOCIAL UNIVERSITY

The amendment and supplementation of some provisions of the Higher Education Law, Decree No. 99/2019/ND-CP, and Decree No. 81/2021/ND-CP by the Government define that the basis of higher education in the process of implementing the autonomy mechanism needs to be closely linked to enhancing accountability, particularly in explaining the issue of quality. Strengthening the work of ensuring and assessing education quality is considered a crucial condition and basis for granting autonomy to universities. This not only demonstrates a commitment to quality before the relevant parties of the higher education institution but also is closely associated with the rights of the higher education institution in admissions and determining tuition fees. Therefore, each higher education institution considers this as a

regular activity to maintain and continuously improve the quality of its training.

After more than 60 years of construction and development, the University of Labour and Social Affairs has always preserved and promoted traditions and discipline in education and training. Investment in facilities for training activities is increasing day by day, modern equipment is constantly being added. The team of highly qualified lecturers has increased in both quantity and quality. The University of Labor and Social Affairs is the only public higher education institution in the field of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs in training highly qualified human resources in an application-oriented manner with strengths in Management majors. Human Resources, Social Work, Insurance, Accounting and Business Administration; is a center for scientific research, technology transfer, and international cooperation in the fields of economics - labor - society to meet the development requirements of the industry, the country and international integration.

The University of Labor and Social Affairs has determined its determination to pioneer innovation, creativity, and improve quality in all aspects, including the quality of training, scientific research, and community service; contributing to promoting fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and training. With a commitment to implementing a culture of quality and social responsibility, the school attaches special importance to quality assurance activities, accreditation and completion of training programs and higher education facilities according to national standards. As of November 2023, the University of Labor and Social Affairs has passed the quality accreditation of educational institutions for the 2nd cycle and 08 university-level training programs according to domestic standards, completing the work of self-regulation. Evaluate 04 Master's level training programs.

The dedicated team of quality assurance specialists receives regular training and development, with 12 staffs trained in education quality assurance and assessment according to Vietnamese and international standards, and 2 staff members certified as assessors. Annually, the university organizes and sends staff to participate in training courses, workshops, conferences, and seminars on education quality assurance to continuously update information and enhance quality.

The University of Labor and Social Affairs continues to invest in and ensure conditions

for enhancing the quality of education, specifically through: developing and operating training programs according to outcome-based standards; periodically reviewing and improving the quality of training programmes; constantly innovating and implementing advanced teaching and learning methods, actively promoting the use of information technology and digital transformation; investing in infrastructure to support training; strengthening the capacity and qualifications of the teaching staff; and closely collaborating with businesses, alumni, and students to participate in the training process.

Ensuring the quality of education is both a solution to build and affirm the brand, and competitive capacity, and the main aspect of managing the quality of education and training, especially in the context of university autonomy. In that context, every official, lecturer, and student of the university understands their responsibilities and actively participates in the process of building, controlling, and improving the quality of all activities. The results of education quality accreditation in the period (2018 - 2023) are evidence of the relentless determination to continuously improve and enhance the quality of activities at the University of Labour - Social Affairs.

III. ADVANTAGES AND DIFFICULTIES IN ENSURING AND ACCREDITING THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Ensuring quality and affirming quality through accreditation is vital for higher education institutions to enhance the effectiveness of university autonomy in the context of increasing international competition and integration in education. The following advantages and difficulties are not only analyzed and summarised from practical experiences in ensuring and accrediting the quality of education at the University of Labour - Society, but also viewed and studied from the general situation of education quality assurance activities in Vietnam.

3.1 Advantages

Regulations on ensuring and accrediting the quality of higher education have been included in the Law by the National Assembly, Decrees by the Government, and Circulars by the Ministry of Education and Training. In addition to setting goals and tasks, solutions to develop the system of

ensuring and accrediting the quality of education for the 2022-2030 period, related regulations and guidelines are also being supplemented and improved according to the Prime Minister's directions and the plans of the Ministry of Education and Training.

The Ministry of Education and Training is establishing a set of standards for quality accreditation of educational institutions and training programs in line with the AUN-QA standards, as well as promoting quality education accreditation according to the standards of reputable regional and international organizations. This is a favorable condition for educational institutions and training programs to reach quality standards in the region, gradually integrating into international education. According to statistics from the Quality Management Department of the Ministry of Education and Training, as of October 31, 2023, there are a total of 187 higher education institutions nationwide that have been evaluated and recognized as meeting the standards of quality education, including 9 institutions meeting foreign standards. The total number of accredited training programs at the university level is 1476, including 1025 programs evaluated according to domestic standards and 451 programs evaluated according to foreign standards. The enhanced self-assessment and quality education accreditation activities in the past period have helped officials, lecturers, and students to realize the importance of ensuring and accrediting the quality of education for the development of educational institutions. In addition, there are several favorable factors for the work of education quality accreditation, such as a relatively comprehensive system of guiding documents, the establishment and gradual operation of quality education accreditation organizations, and the support and participation of international and regional accreditation organizations.

3.2 Difficulties

Ensuring quality, self-assessment, and quality control are continuous and long-term processes that require the participation and consensus of all management staff, faculty, staff, and learners. Moreover, this activity somewhat increases the workload for teachers, leading to difficulties in improving the effectiveness of quality assurance and control. The leadership team still mainly focuses on tasks that bring revenue to the school, such as enrollment, without truly caring about improving the quality of education. Meanwhile, the team responsible for quality

assurance at the unit and program levels is still lacking in quantity, and some have not been deeply trained in quality assurance and control of education. The coordination between different functional units in implementing activities related to this work is still limited. In addition, most members of the self-assessment council are management staff who are responsible for many tasks in the school, so they cannot invest adequate time in self-assessment activities, resulting in the effectiveness of the quality assurance and control council for educational institutions and training programs still being low. In reality, many units that carry out self-assessment and quality control of education (such as writing self-assessment reports or performing comparisons between universities) are still formal and confrontational. For program quality control, implementing improvements based on the recommendations of external evaluation teams is still limited, and the significance of quality control and the formation of a culture of quality control have not truly been developed.

The internal quality assurance information system includes data on the activities of the institution and the training programs that have not been fully and timely updated, integrated to support trend analysis and decision-making to improve the overall quality of education and training programs. Current regulations on training, staff work, working regulations, and KPI-based staff performance evaluation have not closely aligned with the requirements of education and training quality standards, causing difficulties in self-assessment, quality assurance, and education quality verification. As for the team of assessors and verifiers, although nearly 2000 officials and lecturers have completed the verifier training program, only about 346 have been selected and certified as verifiers. This scarcity poses a significant challenge to the current education quality verification activities in Vietnam.

IV. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR DEVELOPING THE EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM AND STRENGTHENING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EDUCATION QUALITY ACCREDITATION

4.1. Solution for developing the education quality assurance system

The Ministry of Education and Training should promptly issue regulations, guidance, or specific frameworks on the internal quality

assurance system of educational institutions, financial guidance in ensuring education quality, and documents linking the responsibilities of lecturers and staff with education quality assurance activities. This is to ensure that every staff member and student at the university has a responsibility to contribute to the quality of the institution and the training programs.

Developing strategies, plans, and quality objectives through establishing appropriate and feasible quality criteria corresponding to the current situation, potential, development strategy, and mission and vision of higher education

institutions. Based on this, higher education institutions identify resources and formulate policies to achieve the set quality criteria and objectives. Here are some suggested quality criteria to monitor and supervise in order to ensure the quality of higher education institutions. The quality assurance activities of educational institutions aim to ensure these quality objectives, helping institutions to monitor, ensure, and continuously improve quality in various areas of operation, from education, scientific research, and infrastructure to international cooperation... [7].

Table 1. Suggestions for some quality criteria to monitor and supervise to ensure the quality of higher education institutions.

Field/ Objective	Quality standards
Field: Training	
Goal 1: Enhance the quality of education	1. The percentage of students graduating on time from the course
	2. Average graduation time of the course.
	3. The percentage or number of first-year students who continue their studies into the second year.
	4. The percentage of students who have graduated from university and continued their studies at the same or different university within 02 years after graduation.
	5. Percentage of students participating in and experiencing research or project-related activities (with collaboration, and guidance from businesses)
	6. The percentage or number of courses, including elective courses (within the curriculum framework), that involve the teaching participation of experts, scholars (outside the institution), employers/labor users, and reputable foreign professors/lecturers..
	7. Level of satisfaction of learners with the software system: the integration of online teaching activities within the software system, the necessary information related to the training program and courses, the learner assessment and evaluation system, and other interactive features...
Goal 2: Improve the quality of admissions	1. Quality of input admission (quantity or percentage of students from specialized schools, with national awards, and international English certificates at a high level of proficiency)
	2. The diversity index of admissions (number or percentage of students from different regions), reflects the school's influence nationwide.
Field: Scientific Research	
Goal 3: Maintain and enhance the school's position, and build the university's foundation in the direction of basic and applied research integration.	1. The total number of scientific and technological topics approved in the year
	2. The total budget provided/sponsored by external units/organizations for scientific and technological topics/activities..
	3. The number of university students or student research projects/topics supported financially by funding sources (grants) within and outside the university..
	4. The number of graduate students or student research projects/topics supported financially by funding sources (grants) within and outside the university.

Field: Community Service	
Goal 4: Enhance community service activities and connections.	1. The number of community service and connection activities/services provided and implemented by the University during the academic year.
	2. The number of faculty members participating in community service activities/projects (organized by units within and outside the university)
	3. The number of students participating in community service activities/projects (organized by units within and outside the university)
Field: Student support services	
Goal 5: Enhance access to learning resources such as library materials, teaching aids, online databases	1. The number of books, magazines, e-books, and databases in the library
	2. The number of searches/uses of online databases
	3. The number of visits to the Library's website during the academic year
	4. The number of uses of the Library's online catalog
Goal 6: Provide students and faculty with the necessary technology resources and services to support the achievement of learning objectives	1. Number of user accounts in computer labs
	2. Number of fully licensed software or education-specific licensed software.
Goal 7: Enhance the quality of students' educational experience by providing programs and services that promote engagement in university activities and increase future employment opportunities.	1. Number of students and alumni participating in counseling services, career orientation workshops, job fairs, recruitment interviews on campus...
	2. Number of actively recruiting employers for students (on-campus or online)
	3. Employment rate of students within 12 months after graduation
Goal 8: Provide services to enhance students' academic success.	1. Số lượng sinh viên nhận học bổng với số tiền có thể bù đắp được 100% học phí
	2. Số lượng sinh viên nhận học bổng với số tiền có thể bù đắp được tối thiểu 50% học phí
	3. Tổng số tiền học bổng hay hỗ trợ tài chính cho sinh viên được vận động từ các nguồn tài trợ bên ngoài trường
Field: Human resources and infrastructure	
Goal 9: Efficient and comprehensive management of human resources in the university.	1. Number of trained and professionally developed management staff in the year
	2. Number of faculty trained and professionally developed in the year
	3. Number of staff, specialists trained and professionally developed in the year
	4. Number of faculty with a Ph.D. degree
Goal 10: Network infrastructure and information management system	1. Available internet bandwidth (Gigabit)
	2. Wireless network speed (Mbps)
	3. Information management software, storing all aspects of the school's operations data.
Field: International cooperation in education.	
Goal 11: Enhance international cooperation in education.	1. Number of international students studying at the university
	2. Number of international exchange students at the university
	3. Number of international faculty teaching and researching at the university

	4. Number of university's regular faculty lecturing at educational institutions abroad
	5. Number of programs taught entirely or partially in English
	6. Number of accredited training programs meeting international and regional quality standards.

- Improve the policy mechanism for self-assessment activities, ensuring and inspecting the quality of education, including reward and sanction policies; policies for training and enhancing the capacity of the team participating in ensuring and inspecting the quality of education; and financial support policies for this work. The flexible application of the "reward-punishment" mechanism contributes to encouraging and motivating the implementation of quality inspection, with the long-term goal of making quality inspection an inherent need of each educational institution in fulfilling the responsibility associated with university autonomy. Depending on resources, schools establish regulations and standards for rewarding and encouraging units and individuals with outstanding achievements in ensuring and inspecting the quality of training programs and educational institutions; priority is given to annual commendation and reward activities.

- Emphasise the role and responsibility of the heads of educational institutions in directing and implementing the work of ensuring and inspecting the quality of education, investing resources in self-assessment, and implementing quality improvement plans after external evaluation. The determination, commitment, investment of effort, and effective leadership and management by the leaders will motivate the collective effort toward the goal of enhancing the overall quality of the units. In addition, the delegation of management and responsibility according to the functions and tasks of each unit, and the professional management coordination methods are essential for perfecting the quality management organizational system of the unit.

- Establish a process for building and developing a quality culture within the unit. Implement a quality culture based on the "Plan - Do - Check - Act" (PDCA) cycle in all activities of the unit, especially in the development of training programs. All units and departments must ensure the PDCA process and cycle in their activities, especially focusing on the Monitoring and Improvement stages. At the same time, raising awareness of quality assurance in education to every staff, lecturer, and learner within the institution.

- Establish quality standards for teaching, scientific research, and community service activities; enhance the capacity of the team responsible for ensuring and assessing the quality of education; strengthen conferences and seminars to share experiences and best practices in ensuring the quality of education.

- Actively implement action plans and quality objectives; periodically review and improve the quality of educational activities; consider this as a regular, frequent, and continuous activity rather than waiting for a new assessment cycle to take place.

- Build an internal quality assurance information system in a modern, professional, and interconnected manner. Implement benchmarking with local and international institutions offering the same training programs as a basis for quality improvement activities. Furthermore, there should be a synchronized system for sharing resources, and common databases serving quality assurance of education, and related activities.

4.2. Solutions and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of education quality assurance

- Promote the application of information technology in education quality assurance activities (database management and evidence, self-assessment report writing, external assessment), early development and operation of software systems managing information, data on ensuring and assessing the quality of education for educational institutions and training programs; reduce effort and time for self-assessment and external assessment as currently practiced.

- Enhancing the capacity and quality of the faculty members to ensure the quality of education in designing and developing training programs. It is necessary to build and develop a team of inspectors at the university level by selecting competent faculty members, and then sending them to attend training courses for inspectors at quality education inspection centers inside and outside the country with legal capacity. According to regulations, both educational institutions and training programs must undergo quality inspection, but the current number of inspectors may not meet this requirement.

Encouraging and creating conditions for trained faculty members to participate in the inspection of training programs as inspectors to exchange experiences with experts, thereby enhancing the reputation of the university.

- To supplement the human resources and contribute to the implementation of the objectives of ensuring and inspecting the quality of training programs and higher education institutions. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training to organize 1 to 2 rounds of examination for competent university and pedagogical college education inspectors to participate in the education quality inspection activities of established quality education inspection organizations. To avoid the current shortage of personnel, where the workload is high but there are not enough qualified individuals to carry it out.

V. CONCLUSION

Ensuring and inspecting the quality of education is an important task of higher education institutions in the context of autonomy, contributing to improving and enhancing the quality of education, and meeting the requirements of regional and international integration. To further strengthen the work of ensuring and inspecting quality, higher education institutions cannot solve the problem of education quality management on an individual basis but must consider all factors affecting the quality of education systematically and coherently. With this approach, higher education institutions need to plan policies and quality objectives, aiming to improve the internal quality assurance system towards regional and international standards, while regularly reviewing and improving quality, and developing a culture of quality throughout the educational institution's activities.

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