IMPACT OF QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES ON CULTURE QUALITY VALUES AT THE UNIVERSITIES: CASE STUDY IN HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

Quality culture supports continuous improvement towards total quality management. Within a university, the effective implementation of quality assurance activities underpins the creation of cultural quality values. This paper investigates the impact of quality assurance activities on cultural values at eight Vietnamese universities in Ho Chi Minh City. A questionnaire was administered to 222 lecturers from eight universities (four public and four private). This covered five areas and collected data on organizational culture, feedback from students, question bank building, and personal perceptions of quality assurance activities. The impact of quality assurance on cultural values was greater at the private universities than at the public universities. This reflects the greater dynamism of private universities, whose autonomy requires them to give greater attention to quality issues.

INTRODUCTION

Modern, industrialized states require education systems that operate in accordance with socio-economic needs. They must support lifelong learning needs and the development of knowledge, especially in the fields of science and technology. This place demands on institutions of higher education, which must change and continually improve the quality of the training, teaching, and scientific research that they conduct. This pressure is intensified by the increasing number of universities, the increasing cost of education, investment

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policies, and questions of autonomy. The growth of private universities has increased the pressure on public universities to improve their quality.

The development of a national higher education system is indispensable if a country is to integrate itself into the international education community. Within such a system educational quality assurance is needed to ensure that strategy is developed in a timely manner and in a way that respects country-specific constraints. Quality assurance is founded on three philosophies: detection (quality control), prevention (quality assurance), and continuous improvement (total quality management). Novel solutions and continuous quality improvement are needed to avoid wasting human resources and delivering products of poor quality. A university culture must be developed those values continuous improvement and sustainable development. A quality assurance program is indispensable if national universities are to survive and compete in the creation of knowledge.

There are two foundations to quality assurance: (1) maintaining and assuring quality and (2) upgrading and improving quality. Studies by Arsovski (2007), Gvaramadze (2008), the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (2008), and the Asean University Network (AUN, 2011) discussed the mechanisms, forms, and functioning of quality assurance. External quality assurance has been investigated by Parri (2006), Dill (2007), and the EUA (2010), from two principal perspectives: the co-ordinate perspective of Vroeijenstijn (2003) and Karkoszka (2009), and the opposing perspective of Harman (2000), the AUN (2009), and Vroeijenstijn (2009). Karkoszka argued that an external quality assurance system is effective only if it operates closely with an internal system. The European Universities Association (2010) argued that external evaluation procedures are not truly objective, and may produce a culture of contentment or compliance. Lewis (2012) emphasized the necessity of a focus on the improvement of quality, rather than on accountability. Quality assurance relies on the competence of both individuals and the collective, according to Ehlers (2009), Mhlanga (2008), Xiaoxiang and Liping (2011), and Mangnale and Potluri (2011).

The studies of Berry (1997), Gordon (2002), the European Universities Association (2006), Harvey and Stensaker (2008), Farcas and Moica (2009), Harvey (2009), and Ehlers (2009) elucidate the concept of quality culture. Two main approaches can be identified. That of Admed (2008), Gvaramadze (2008), and Vettori (2012) concentrates on actions that relate closely to organizational culture, whereas Harvey (2009) and Lanarès (2009) focus on awareness, emphasizing human elements. Tungkunanan et al. (2008), Nygaard (2009), Lanarès (2009), Katiliute and Neverauskas (2009), Berings (2009), Wahab et al (2010), Domovic and Vidovic (2010), and Loukkola and Zhang (2010) have investigated the development of a quality culture in a university setting. The approach of the European Universities Association (2007) and Nygaard (2009) focuses on quality assurance activity rather than on orientation. Wood (1998), Smith and Tunnicliff (2005), and Vettori et al. (2007) discussed the role of cultural values. Harvey and Stensaker (2008), Ehlers (2009), and Daniellou (2009) proposed cultural models. The models of

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Ehlers and Lanarès focused on individual and collective competence, whereas the other authors focused on activities that create cultural values.

To ensure that developmental goals are understood and supported by managers, lecturers, staff, learners, and other stakeholders including the society itself, universities must develop a culture by which awareness is generated. Individuals must understand their responsibilities in ensuring that goals are met. This is especially significant in competition between public universities and private universities. The approach must encompass the university's mission, goals, and strategy. The decisions taken, solutions proposed, and roadmaps developed must build a quality culture and mesh with internal quality assurance systems.

Terms such as "quality culture", "quality assurance", and "quality accreditation" are neither familiar nor well-understood in Vietnam. Quality assurance is generally seen as a function of specialists, rather than requiring the participation of the entire university, including learners and other stakeholders. Quality assurance has been discussed since the early 2000s. Starting in 2009, awareness of quality culture has been disseminated through seminars, conferences, and training courses organized by the Ministry of Education and Training. Universities have begun to understand quality culture as a tool and method for developing sustainable quality assurance systems, and are beginning to implement quality assurance activities. However, little research has been conducted on quality culture in either public or private universities. Raising the awareness of university staff, teachers, and students is a task for managers and educational experts. Despite the growing interest in quality assurance, doubts remain as to whether such interest is intrinsic (providing the base for a quality culture) or merely formal (essentially for show).

The foundations have been laid for the establishment of a quality culture in Vietnamese universities. The current study investigated the impact of quality assurance activities on the development of cultural values, using as a case study the universities of Ho Chi Minh City.

THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE QUALITY CULTURE

The Internal Quality Assurance

Growing competition in higher education has affirmed the importance of quality assurance in private universities. SEAMEO (2002) discussed the evolution of quality assurance from 1985 to 1998, and particularly the innovation of Total Quality Management. Quality assurance activities began to take on a clear orientation within the institutions. UNESCO (2003) defined quality assurance in higher education as requiring the assessment and systematic supervision of institutional activities. INQAAHE (2004) defined quality assurance in terms of the attitudes, objects, activities, and procedures that maintain and enhance academic standards. Vlăsceanu et al. (2007)

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focused on the close relationship and mutual influence between awareness and commitment and the development of quality culture.

Many definitions, concepts, and perspectives on quality assurance have been proposed, involving a range of operational factors and both internal and external systems. Adelman (2009) argued that the development of a quality culture in higher education is essential, to underpin quality assurance. Two main objectives emerge: the strengthening of internal capacity and compliance with external standards and rules (Costreie et al., 2009).

In Reisberg's (2010) view, quality assurance combines self-regulation, reflection, and continuous reform. Each process has a different timescale within each institution. Quality assurance requires continuous development as well as evaluation, monitoring, maintenance, and improvement. Total Quality Management sets two important goals: accountability and continuous improvement. In contrast, UNESCO (2011) identified three elements: quality control, accountability, and improvement.

Cardoso et al. argued that the diversity of concepts and approaches to quality and quality assurance in higher education can be reduced to culture, compliance, and consistency. These provide the authority for quality (Cardoso et al. 2016). "Discovery, general explanation/exploratory/general" can express or represent something. Such an approach is not superior to other approaches, but stresses different contributions (Cardoso et al., 2018).

Quality assurance is related to quality improvement, being parts of the same process. Quality improvement involves enhancing or maximizing quality, while quality assurance entails ensuring compliance with concrete rules and standards set by external agencies (Williams, 2016).

For all the differing perspectives on quality assurance, at root are the internal and external systems relevant to any given institution. While some definitions of quality assurance bundle together culture and accreditation, other definition's view quality assurance as a distinct set of methods and procedures, though having close relations with the wider system.

In summary, the term quality assurance encompasses the mechanisms and measures that monitor, test, evaluate, and maintain quality improvement and ensure accountability for all university activities.

The Quality Culture

As with culture, values are specific to the fields in which organizations operate.

In the view of Holden (2006) a distinction can be made between instrumental values, institutional values, and intrinsic values. These are interdependent, and cultural values emerge from their interaction.

Woods (1998) defined six values that underpin quality culture: (1) mutual consensus within the institution, (2) absence of barriers between superiors and other staff, (3) open-mindedness and honesty, (4) information is shared, (5) a

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focus on process, and (6) no emphasis on success or failure, only learning experiences.

Smith and Tunnicliff's (2005) "Integrating values into university culture" had the aim of linking individual values and organizational values via dialogue and feedback. This is intended to raise awareness of common values, to achieve consensus, and to achieve a shared understanding of the mission and vision of the university. It should result in six common values: (1) continuous improvement, (2) commitment, (3) information sharing, (4) accountability, (5) effectiveness, and (6) innovation. Together, they demonstrate that the university takes an interest in the opinions of stakeholders and values staff contributions, which will help change the university culture.

The research of Strydom et al. (2004) on the developmental impact of quality assurance systems within institutions demonstrated a mismatch between quality, culture, and change. The organizational culture plays an important role in the development of quality management systems, while the establishment of quality culture generates practical activities and rule systems that focus on quality improvement. In particular, it is necessary to concentrate attention on those organizations and individuals that are barriers to change. Dano and Stensaker (2007) stressed the importance of external quality assurance in the development of quality culture.

Lanarès (2008) offered two perspectives on the development of quality culture: (1) quality assurance begins with quality culture, then quality assurance feeds back into quality culture; (2) implementation of key activities facilitates the development of quality culture.

Milisiunaite et al. (2009) proposed a continuous performance improvement model in which quality culture and academic culture underpin the development and implementation of quality management systems.

Kristensen (2010) suggested that quality culture develops automatically at institutions that are exposed to external quality impacts, so that the balance between internal and external quality assurance is important. The author set out the following principles and practices: (1) care for quality at all organizational levels, (2) an international orientation, (3) quality in action and the integration of a quality system into the strategy of the organization, (4) a closed feedback cycle, (5) delegation of authority across all levels of the organization, (6) a quality culture based on both top-down and bottom-up approaches, (7) participation of learners, and (8) employment of external experts.

The European Quality Culture Research Project of Sursock (2011) emphasized that quality assurance, and in particular quality culture, are rooted in questions of consciousness, ideology, and power. Vettori (2012) stressed the significance of the quality assurance system and quality culture within the university and proposed peer review of three types: "strategy and policy", "tools and practices", and "principles and assumptions". This builds a quality culture based on values and consensus.

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In summary, cultural values determine the orientation and ensure the commitment of everyone within the organization, while cultural values are formed and developed in parallel with organizational development. The literature reviewed above yields the following overview: cultural values are central to those activities, actions, words, and thinking that ensure that quality requirements are met and are in accordance with the cultural values and goals of the university. The core values are responsibility, cooperation, sharing, consensus, belief, commitment, equality, action, pioneer, innovation, and creation. We propose two further values, awareness and competence which represent quality perception (the intangible aspect) and quality competence (the tangible aspect).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaires

A questionnaire was administered to 222 lecturers from four public and four private universities in Ho Chi Minh City. It comprised five questions with 71 items using Likert scales in which 1 represented 'strongly disagree' and 5 represented 'strongly agree'.

- Personal awareness related to school activities (23 items);
- Organizational culture (9 items);
- Feedback from students (22 items);
- Question bank construction (11 items) and
- Individual recognition from implementing quality assurance (6 items).

Cronbach's Alpha was applied to the items in each question giving reliability ranging from 0.769 to 0.958. Figure 1 shows the number of participants from each institution by type.

Participants

The samples were randomly drawn from eight universities in Ho Chi Minh City (over 30% of the total number of private universities in Ho Chi Minh City). Responses were received from 222 lecturers: 118 from public universities and 104 from private universities. In addition, interviews were conducted with three university leaders, the heads of eight education quality assurance departments, the heads of ten further departments and 20 lecturers. Interviews lasted from 15 to 45 minutes. If face-to-face interviews were not possible, they were conducted by telephone.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V22). Descriptive statistics were used. Linear regression was applied to determine the relationship between awareness of quality assurance and the quality culture within the public and private universities.

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RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

In Table 1, the impact of quality assurance activities on individuals and awareness of quality culture is expressed as means from the Likert scales, in this case representing the range from not at all influential to extremely influential.

Table 1. Impact Of Quality Assurance Activities on Perception of Quality Culture

Values of a quality culture	Public universities				Private universities			
	Individual		Collective		Individual		Collective	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Awareness	3.76	.940	3.51	.976	4.04	.965	4.06	.984
Responsibility	3.69	1.107	3.58	1.057	4.10	.919	4.17	.980
Cooperation, Sharing	3.61	.996	3.31	1.019	3.41	.648	3.42	.910
Consensus	3.76	.884	3.58	.871	3.57	.856	3.64	.994
Belief	3.44	1.000	3.33	.943	3.54	.749	3.59	1.058
Commitment	3.53	.984	3.30	1.032	3.89	1.105	3.88	1.068
Equality	3.48	.949	3.40	.926	4.06	1.032	3.95	1.037
Creation, Innovation	3.63	.985	3.50	1.060	3.71	.733	3.62	.917
Pioneer	3.36	.967	3.31	.976	3.75	.890	3.52	1.005
Competence	3.53	.967	3.37	.950	4.05	.939	4.01	.940
Action	3.53	1.027	3.45	.975	3.92	1.103	4.02	1.033

s of teachers and faculty members was higher at private universities than at public universities, particularly in terms of responsibility, commitment, equality, competence, and action. The results indicate that quality assurance

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activities affect individual and collective awareness of quality values (formation of quality culture).

The formation of quality culture is "steady state", reflecting internal requirements and external needs. Every individual, and the organization itself, must develop awareness through the implementation of quality assurance activities, internal and external policies, and observation of whether the values received are authentic or formal. They must then decide whether to accept or reject such values.

Inferential Analysis

We next analyzed the factors that may have a positive influence on quality culture.

Linear regression was used to predict the impact of each factor. The independent variables concerned individual perceptions related to school activities and organization culture, including feedback from students, question bank construction, and individual perceptions of quality assurance activities. The cultural values were the dependent variables. These comprised information, trust, and participation values from the European quality culture model (2006):

- Communication: awareness, responsibility and cooperation - sharing.
- Trust: awareness, consensus, belief, commitment and equality.
- Participation: awareness, responsibility, creativity - innovation, pioneer, competence and action.

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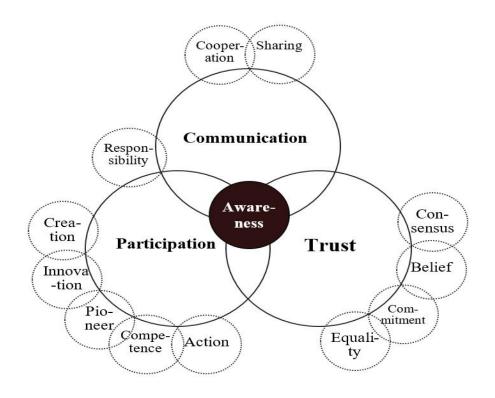
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Figure 1. Three Components and Values of Quality Culture

The independent variables were significantly correlated with the cultural components. Factors with correlation coefficients r> 0.4 were selected.

We built 12 models corresponding to the cultural values of information, trust, and participation at the individual and collective levels. Tables 2 and 3 show the results for public universities and private universities.

Table 2 compares the influence of the three cultural factors, disaggregated by university type. They were shown to have higher relevance within private universities. More factors were influential at private universities, suggesting that quality assurance activities have a higher impact on quality culture at those institutions. However, the r values showed no significant differences.

Table 2 Individual Level Linear Regression Models

Quality culture components		Statistically meaningful independent variables	R^2 value
Communication	Public universities	- Current teaching results meeting program learning outcomes (***), r = 0.519 - Creative ideas and innovation support (*), r = 0.470	0.297
	Private universities	- "Quality is more highly regarded than quantity" motto (**), r = 0.414 - Improvement of quality awareness in teaching and learning (Feedback collection) (**), r = 0.407	0.238
Trust	Public university	- The promotion of teaching activities through quality assurance activities (*), r = 0.460 - Contribution to renovation of the school's policies to improve quality (Feedback) (***), r = 0.416	0.298
	Private University	- Behavior control (***), r = 0.425 - Raising quality awareness in teaching and learning (Feedback) (***), r = 0.433 - Strengthening the responsibilities of teachers (Question Bank) (***), r = 0.441	0.460
Participation	Public university	- Teaching as a companion in career (**), r = 0.425	0.278
	Private	- Willingness to devote to the	0.454

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	University	development of the unit and the school (*), r = 0.521 - Behavior control (**), r = 0.464 - Sharing known information about quality assurance activities to everyone (*), r = 0.426 - Improvement of quality awareness in teaching and learning (Feedback) (**), r = 0.434 - Avoiding learning by heart (Question Bank) (***), r = 0.448	
Note: *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001			

Table 3 shows the higher relevance of the three models at private universities and the greater number of relevant factors influencing quality culture. For respondents from private universities, the level of relevance was high in terms of trust (0.653) and participation (0.759). Little difference was found in the correlation between the content items and the quality culture components. In private universities, "Feedback from learners about the correspondence between teaching activities and higher education in Vietnam" and "Income guarantee" had correlation coefficients of r 0.800 and 0.727 respectively, suggesting that these factors strongly influence the attentiveness of the teachers.

Table 3 Collective Level Linear Regression Models

Quality culture components		Statistically meaningful independent variables	R^2 value
Communication	Public university	- Current teaching results' meeting program learning outcomes (***), r = 0.519 - Creative ideas and innovation support (*), r = 0.470	0.297
	Private university	- Willingness to devote to the development of the unit and the school (*), r = 0.438 - Guaranteeing the process of testing and assessment is rigorous and in compliance with the regulations (Test bank) (*), r = 0.431 - Support for quality assurance activities (**), r = 0.431	0.352
Trust	Public university	- Teaching Self- evaluation of the faculty / group (*), r = 0.502 - Current teaching results'	0.410

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			meeting program learning outcomes (***), r = 0.613	
		Private university	- Feedback from learners about the correspondence between teaching activities of teachers and current higher education in Vietnam (***), r = 0.688 - "Quality is more highly regarded than quantity" motto (**), r = 0.564 - Strengthening the responsibilities of teachers (collecting feedback) (**), r = 0.457 - Support for quality assurance activities (**), r = 0.420	0.653
Participation		Public university	- Current teaching results' meeting curriculum learning outcomes (***), r = 0.515 - Improving quality awareness in teaching and learning (collecting feedback) (***), r = 0,401	0.358
		Private university	- Good teaching conditions and environment (***), r = 0,504 - Feedback from learners about the correspondence between teaching activities of teachers and current higher education in Vietnam (**), r = 0.800 - Income guarantee (*), r = 0.727 - Efforts to fulfill the teaching tasks (**), r = 0.634 - Self-study to improve professional skills (**), r = 0.588 - Teaching self-evaluation (***), r = 0.402 - "Quality is more highly regarded than quantity" motto (**), r = 0.566 - The indispensability of quality assurance in a university (*), r = 0.417	0.759
Note: *p < 0.05 **p < 0.01 ***p < 0.001				

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Tables 4 and 5 show similarities and differences between the impact on quality culture in public and private universities.

Table 4. Similarities And Differences at The Individual Level

Public university	Private university
- Current teaching results' meeting program learning outcomes - Teaching as a companion in career Support for creative ideas, innovation - The promotion of teaching activities through quality assurance activities - Contribution to renovation of the school's policies to improve quality (Feedback)	- Willingness to devote to the development of the unit and the school - "Quality is more highly regarded than quantity" motto - Behavior control - Sharing known information about quality assurance activities to everyone - Improving quality awareness in teaching and learning (collecting feedback) - Strengthening the responsibilities of teachers (Question Bank). - Avoiding learning by heart (Question Bank).

Table 4 shows the important factors that influence the awareness and actions of individuals at private universities. These include willingness to devote energy to the development of units and schools. The statement that "Quality is more highly regarded than quantity" reflects the role that quality plays in the survival of an autonomous university.

Table 5. Similarities And Differences in Factors at The Collective Level

Public university	Private university
- Teaching self-evaluation of the faculty / group - Current teaching results' meeting program learning outcomes - Support for creative ideas, innovation - Improving quality awareness in teaching and learning (collecting feedback)	- Good teaching conditions and environment - Feedback from learners about the correspondence between teaching activities of teachers and current higher education in Vietnam - Income guarantee. - Efforts to fulfill the teaching tasks - Self-study, to improve professional skills. - Teaching self-evaluation - Willingness to devote to the development of the unit and the school - "Quality is more highly regarded than quantity" motto - Strengthening the responsibilities of teachers (Get feedback). - Guaranteeing the process of testing and assessment is rigorous and in compliance with

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	the regulations (Test bank) - Support for quality assurance activities. - The indispensability of quality assurance in a university

Table 5 confirms the significance of quality at private universities, achieved through collective efforts to fulfill teaching tasks, devotion of effort to the development of the unit and the school, the belief that "Quality is more highly regarded than quantity", and support for quality assurance activities.

Our models suggest that universities must promote their strengths to upgrade their cultural value systems and enhance awareness and action. The development of action plans had not been achieved as expected at either type of school.

The differences noted in Tables 4 and 5 demonstrate the greater dynamism of private universities, whose members are more strongly focused on quality.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results demonstrate that quality assurance activities positively influence cultural values in universities. Differences in the mechanisms and models of governance produce variations in quality values and quality ownership. Governance has a greater impact on quality assurance and cultural values in private universities. This reflects their greater autonomy, as the dynamism of private universities requires them to pay more attention to quality. The results of this study will inform the transition to university autonomy now taking place in Vietnam. They confirm that quality assurance activities are vital to a university and lay the foundation for quality culture.

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