

MASTER THESIS



INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN VIETNAM'S HIGHER EDUCATION: THE INFLUENCE BY INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

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Chapter one

1. Introduction:

Chapter one contains the background, context, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study. In this chapter, the background of the study will be introduced to summarize generally the phenomenon of quality assurance in higher education, which motivated the inception of this study. The context will describe the system of Vietnam's higher education and the development of quality assurance system operating in the country. Further, the problem statement and the research questions will be slated for exploration. The last portions of this chapter will tackle the purpose of this study and its significance.

1.1 Quality assurance in higher education

1.1.1 The concept of quality in higher education

Quality is an elusive concept (Green, 1994). There are many books and articles written to try to define the nature of quality; however, there is no general agreement on its concept (DAAD, 2010). The objective definition of quality does not exist (DAAD, 2010) even though we all may instinctively understand what it means. This is because quality is often subjectively associated with people's certain concept and certain expectations toward the perception of which is good. This leads to the situation that quality seems to have many facets. According to Reeves and Bednar (1994, cited by Stensaker, 2007), quality in general can be defined as value, conformance to specifications, conformance to requirements, fitness for use, loss avoidance, or meeting customer expectation.

Due to the fact that quality is multi-facet, over the last 15 years in higher education, there has been a number of the contribution of researchers focusing on the difficulties of defining quality (Harvey & William, 2010). The most influential empirical study which is often quoted in the discussion on quality in higher education is conducted by Harvey and Green (1993). In this study, Harvey and Green explained different concepts of quality perceived by different stakeholders in higher education. According to them, stakeholder's views on quality could be categorized based on five definitions: quality as exceptional, quality as perfection, quality as fitness for purpose, quality as value for money, and quality as transformation.

After analyzing thoroughly the various concepts of quality, Harvey and Green (1993) concluded that "quality means different things to different people". Apparently, the quality of higher education is seen as a value about which different stakeholders in higher education will have different priorities and their focus may also be different. For example, while students and teachers may focus on the process of learning and teaching, the focus of school managers might be on the outputs of education. Accordingly, as stated by Harvey and Green (1993), it is impossible to speak of "the quality" but to speak about "qualities".

In addition to the assumption of having many facets, quality is also assumed as multi-dimensional. Quality has many dimensions and "on some dimensions, the quality of a thing may be good while on other dimensions it is not" (Kalkwijk, 1998). Accordingly, discussing the quality of a program from one dimensional view-point will be meaningless. All the dimensions of quality should be taken into account, when quality is discussed and judged.

Given the different views and multi-dimensional notion on quality, quality in higher education often remains undefined in operational terms (Westerheijden et al, 2007). Therefore, according to Green (1994), the best can be achieved is to define as clearly as possible the criteria that each stakeholder in higher education uses to judge the quality.

1.1.2 Quality assurance system in higher education

Quality assurance in higher education is described as the systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in order to guarantee the improvement of quality in higher education and aims at making higher education meet the needs of students, employers and financiers (DAAD, 2010). The approach to quality assurance consists of accreditation, external quality assurance and internal quality assurance.

Accreditation is an instrument used to guarantee the quality threshold (Westerheijden et al, 2010). It is a special form of quality assessment process, in which higher education institutions, degree types and programs are systematically evaluated according to the previously formulated standards by an authorized agency. The institutions or programs will then get a formal approval to exist within the higher education system after accreditation process completes successfully.

While accreditation of a university or program can be conceived as public statement about the quality of education, external quality assurance is defined as the action of an independent body to assess the quality of performance of a University (Kallwijk, 1998). External quality assurance also has the function of control, accountability or improvement of institutional quality.

With accreditation and external quality assurance schemes, government seems to have a special responsibility regarding quality assurance; however, it is argued that the university itself, especially its staff and students, are mainly responsible for providing quality. Therefore, the development of an efficient internal quality assurance system will play a role in supporting the institution to achieve its quality. Internal quality assurance is fully oriented to institutional quality improvement (Kalkwijk, 1998). It concentrates on academic issues, incorporates every institutional activity and collects institutional information and evidence to insure quality within the institution.

1.2 Background of the study:

Nowadays, quality assurance and its vocabulary are so popular in higher education policy in most of the countries all over the world. Universities and colleges now pay more and more attention on adopting quality assurance mechanism as well as system in order to ensure that their students can be provided with high quality and that their degrees and diplomas are widely recognized (Harman, 2000). Today such recognition is seen as important by not only the government but also the Universities and even employers.

There are many reasons given for the adoption of quality assurance. First of all, all academics want to train graduates with adequate knowledge, skills and attitude so that they can fulfill the requirement of employer and meet the needs of society (AUN, 2010). Apart from that, quality assurance is also an important element for public accountability, particularly to government who expect to see the education activities with appropriate standards (Harman, 2000). Also, quality assurance can provide students with useful information for their choice of the Universities or educational courses among many other offers. And more importantly, at institutional level, quality assurance can contribute to the improvement of teaching as well as administrative processes, which can lead to the improvement of overall system (Harman, 2000).

Looking back at the history of quality assurance, one can see that quality assurance in the form of accreditation was first introduced in 1989 in Central and Eastern Europe, and later moved gradually to Western Europe (Sursock, 2010). At present, accreditation has spread over the European higher education due to the appearance of Bologna Process.

Initiating the Bologna Process, the Bologna Declaration was launched in 1999 with the aim at setting common structure and tools for higher education in Europe. In 2003, with the launch of Berlin Communique, quality was placed as top priority in policy agenda, and most importantly, it landed the responsibility for ensuring quality on the institutions. Further in 2005, Bergen Communique issued the European Standards and Guidelines. Also, this Communique stressed the ambition to provide a more accessible higher education and increase the attractiveness of European Higher Education Area to other

parts of the worlds. According to Sursock (2010), these elements of Bologna Process have formulated the backbone of quality assurance dimension in European higher education.

Additionally, it was also highlighted in the study of Westerheijden (2001, cited by Harvey & William, 2010) that Bologna Process was aimed to make European higher education more transparent and encourage the development of clearer quality assurance processes, which seems to result in Universities' increased attention on the establishment of their internal quality processes recently.

In the survey conducted by Sursock and Smidt (2010), it was found out that 60% of institutions in Europe have developed internal quality processes in the past 10 years. Also in 2010, another study conducted by Loukola and Zang confirmed the findings of that survey. In the light of this study, the results revealed that quality assurance processes are truly attached on the agenda of European higher education institutions, demonstrating the fact that these institutions are "developing their quality processes in a serious manner". However, the study further mentioned that even though some Universities are very well developed in certain QA areas, there are still some others which are just at the initial stage of the QA development. Moreover, according to Loukola and Zang (2010), there are still many challenges and difficulties that could be identified as common to most of all the Universities.

In the same vein, looking at the developments of internal quality assurance in the ASEAN region, one can see that the Universities are also in different stages of QA development. In general, as mentioned in DAAD (2010), there are some Universities having a more or less well-developed internal quality assurance system while some other Universities in the region still lack an effective system. Most of the Universities are still inexperienced in carrying out the activities of quality assurance and have many problems to face. Some of the obstacles were mentioned in DAAD (2010) as follows:

- Lack of quality innovations
- Staff resistance because of a lack of awareness and change culture
- Resistance to a perceived threat
- Not enough knowledge available in the University. Therefore, training is needed
- It is difficult to define what quality is
- The purpose and added value are not always clear
- Communication between staff and management is not always good.

As far as Vietnam's quality assurance system is concerned, the concepts of quality assurance and accreditation were already introduced in Vietnamese higher education at the beginning of this century. According to Duong (2010), modern quality assurance was first introduced in Vietnam's higher education via the World Bank's first Vietnam Higher Education Project in 1998. In 2006-2007, with the help from Profqim project, documentation about the set of accreditation standards was created to advice the higher education institutions for external assessment. At the same time, quality assurance centers were established at five Universities (Hue, Danang, Can Tho, Thai Nguyen, and Vinh). More recently, with the support from the World Bank's second Higher Education Project for a quality assurance center network, quality assurance centers have been established in many more Universities (Duong, 2010).

Since 2005, there have been more and more intensive QA discussions, initial preparation of QA procedures, the introduction of external accreditation exercises as well as the conduct of self evaluation, supported by the training activities organized by the General Department of Evaluation, Training and Assessment (GDETA), and often with the participation of international projects (HEP1, HEP2 and Profqim). Together with these training activities, the requirement for Universities to establish quality assurance center to be responsible for their internal quality assurance activities has been considered as the deliberate strategy to promote quality assurance processes in Vietnamese higher education institutions. Nevertheless, whether Universities in Vietnam have actually implemented quality assurance process as expected, especially when the international projects ended, is still ambiguous. Based on that fact, this study mainly focuses on investigating how Vietnamese Universities implement internal quality assurance,

and at the same time learning about the extent that international projects have influence on such implementation of internal quality assurance in Vietnam's higher education.

According to Nguyen et al (2009), there had not been much research learning about quality assurance in Vietnam and the literature has just provided general information on quality assurance and its basic principles. Therefore, conducting studies on internal quality assurance activities implemented in higher education institutions in Vietnam or equivalent becomes truly essential, especially in the context that Universities have a deficiency in quality.

1.3 Research problem and its context:

1.3.1 Brief background of Vietnam's higher education system:

Over the past 10 years, higher education in Vietnam has experienced many changes (Nguyen et al, 2009). The first change is the rapid increase in the number of universities and the number of students. Since 1993, the system has expanded at a dramatic rate (Hayden & Lam, 2010). In 1999- 2000 there were 153 universities and colleges (69 universities, 84 colleges). By 2011- 2012 the number of universities has increased to 386, in which 163 were universities and 223 were colleges. The number of higher education students has increased 2.4 times by 2011-2012 as compared to the number of students in 1999-2000; however, the number of teachers just increased 1.4 times, causing a big gap in students/teachers ratio. It was also stated in the country report (2009) that in 1987, one teacher was in charge of 6.6 students, in 2009 one teacher on average managed 28 students. After 22 years, the number of students increased 13 times, but the number of teachers increased only 3 times. By 2011-2012, the ratio of students/teachers remained at 30, which is widely regarded as being too high (Hayden & Lam Q.T, 2010). In that context, the dilution of quality in higher education is unavoidable, causing a major concern to society.

The second change is the participation of private sector in higher education. The private sector of higher education in Vietnam is referred to as non-public sector. One of the characteristics of this private sector which distinguishes it from the larger and better established public sector is that it does not receive direct fund from the government (Hayden & Dao V.K, 2010). Currently, there are two types of institutions in private sector in Vietnam's higher education system: people founded and fully private. People-founded institutions are established by a socio-economic organization such as trade unions, professional associations or youth organizations. Once got approval to establish, people-founded universities and colleges are required to survive on the revenue they receive from tuition fees. People-founded institutions cannot receive any direct funding from the government; however, they may receive the revenue from investment or from the sale of certain educational service (Hayden & Dao, 2010). Fully private institutions are established by individuals. The first private university in Vietnam is the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology-Vietnam (RMIT), which was established in 2001. However, at first, RMIT was not legalized as a private university. It was initially regarded as a foreign direct investment firm and had to operate according to the Law on Foreign Investment. Until 2005, after the Decision 14/2005/QD-Ttg which allowed the foreign-based private institutions to operate under a common control, various fully private institutions have been permitted to establish (Hayden & Dao, 2010).

The number of non-public higher education institutions has also increased sharply. In 1997, there were only 15 non-public universities, but by May 2009 there were 81 institutions (44 universities and 37 colleges), an increase of 5.4 times. This private sector is expected to play an important role in helping Vietnamese education system fulfill the mission of providing mass education to students in Vietnam. In the Higher Education Reform Agenda 2006- 2020, the Government established the target that by 2020, private university students will account for 40% of all enrolments. However, even though Vietnamese Government has placed an increasing expectation on this sector for its contribution to Vietnam's higher education system, the quality of private system has been a prime concern of the whole society. Fact shows that many private universities fail to meet the requirements of educational quality. There are fewer and fewer students willing to enroll in non-public higher education institutions every year due to the

quality issue. Studying in these institutions is just an unwilling choice; the first choice for students entering higher education is always the public institutions (Hayden & Dao, 2010). It is also true that nowadays employers are reluctant to offer jobs to the holders of degrees from private institutions because they don't trust the educational quality in these institutions.

The third change in higher education system in Vietnam is the phenomenon of establishing provincial universities in every province of the country, and the phenomenon that every college wants to upgrade to university status. Currently, 40/63 provinces and central cities have universities. 62/63 provinces and cities have at least one college or university (98%, except DakNong province) (Country report, 2009). The number of universities and colleges in the mountainous and disadvantaged socio - economic areas has also increased, such as the North West areas (1 university, 8 colleges), Highland (3 universities, 10 colleges); the Mekong Delta (11 universities and 27 colleges). Even though the establishment of provincial universities will create more opportunities for students, who are living in rural, remote, mountainous and ethnic minorities areas to attend higher education; it raises the question that whether the capacity of the system will meet the requirement of quality assurance issue.

1.3.2 Quality assurance in Vietnam's higher education

Deriving from the aforementioned phenomena occurring in Vietnam's higher education due to its fast expansion in the system, it appears that the Vietnamese Government has realized the importance of systematic reform to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. And, quality assurance was considered as one of the means to achieve this goal. In fact, over the last few years, educational accreditation and assurance system in Vietnam has been gradually formed. The modern quality assurance was first introduced into Vietnamese higher education system in 2000 via the World Bank's First Vietnam Higher Education Project (HEP1), which provided fund to 30 universities to strengthen their infrastructure. In 2003, the General Department of Education Testing and Accreditation (GDETA) was established with the responsibility of establishing an accreditation system and coordinating examinations used for students entrance examinations. This establishment marked a new age of developing education quality accreditation system in Vietnam. In 2004, the regulations on education quality accreditation were temporarily issued by MoET. According the regulations, there are 3 stages for the university accreditation process: Self-study conducted by the universities, external panel visited by a panel, and recognition decided by MoET. At first, the self-study reports required the universities to address 10 standards and 53 criteria, pointing the strengths and weaknesses and planning for improvement. In 2005 education quality was officially put into Education Law.

In 2006-2007, the first pilot external review was conducted at 20 selected universities. With the assistance of the Dutch Profqim project (a sub-project of Vietnam-Netherlands Higher Education Projects), the members of accreditation teams were assisted with procedure and protocols to work in a consistent manner. After two years piloting and reviewing, in 2007, a new revised "Regulations for Higher Education Accreditation" consisting of 10 standards and 61 criteria, was accepted and issued to assist universities in conducting self-study. At the same time, Universities were under the MoET's obligation to set up quality assurance centers to take responsibility for their internal quality assurance activities.

So far, the quality assurance system in higher education in Viet Nam is quite complete, with the internal quality assurance system in institutions referring to the quality assurance centers (QACs), and the external assurance system referring to the GDETA. Indeed, with the support from international projects, HEP 1 and Profqim and more recently the HEP2; since 2008 the accreditation process in Vietnam's higher education has been speeded up and more and more QACs have been established in many other universities (Duong, 2010).

1.3.3 International projects and Quality Assurance in Vietnam:

- A glance at World Bank's Higher Education Project 1 and Higher Education Project 2:

The World Bank has been playing a role of a loan and expertise provider in Vietnam's higher education in two major projects: Higher Education Project 1 (HEP1) and Higher Education Project 2 (HEP2) starting in 1998 and 2007, respectively, to help Vietnam confront with the challenges in its recent reforms of higher education system.

HEP1 addressed the World Bank's strategic development objectives, which were: (a) to increase coherence, flexibility and responsiveness of higher education to the changing demands of society and the market economy; (b) to improve efficiency and resource utilization in higher education; and (c) to improve the quality of curriculum, teaching, learning and research in higher education institutions (WB, 2008). HEP 1 had three components to meet the objectives of the project. Regarding to the issue of quality assurance in higher education, HEP 1 aimed to help MoET set up a department at system level to be responsible for quality assurance, undertaking quality audits and providing objectives assessments of system and institutional quality of performance (WB, 2008). At the same time, it was mentioned that HEP 1 also supported to review the results of a quality assurance pilot test accreditation exercise conducted by 20 Universities (WB, 2008).

HEP2 focused more on "building a higher education system in Vietnam that is innovative, responsive to the demands of the market and of high quality is essential to the economic growth and development of Vietnam" (WB, 2007b). HEP 2 included 3 components. The first component provides the Government of Vietnam with technical assistance in developing policy options and recommendations in governance, financing, and quality assurance, and in building an integrated information system to support this policy development and future policy implementation. The second component supports selected universities to extend their autonomy through implementing their own strategic development plans for improving teaching and research. The third component gives operational support to a project administration, management and monitoring and evaluation (WB, 2007). More specifically, in respect to quality assurance, HEP2 provided technical assistance to help Vietnamese Government develop policy options and recommendations on a set of minimum standards against which public and non-public Universities can be accredited, establish an independent accreditation agency, and develop policy options and recommendations on Vietnam's higher education admission system (WB, 2007). Additionally, in order to fulfill those mentioned above objectives, HEP2 provided individual international consultants to advice on the development of institutional quality culture, and local consultants to conduct trainings for quality assurance centers at Universities to develop feedback collection instruments from Universities' stakeholders. Further, HEP2 also assisted the Universities with local consultants to collect information on labor market information graduates (WB, 2011).

In general, so far as the quality assurance system in Vietnamese higher education is concerned, with the two Higher Education projects, World Bank aimed at improving capacity in Vietnam's higher education system, both in the system level and institutional level.

- A glance at Profqim:

Profqim was one of the two sub-projects of the Vietnam-Netherlands Higher Education project , which supported the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) in the implementation of some aspects of these HERA objectives. Profqim was the short name of "Setting up and development of Quality Assurance centres (QAC's) at 5 universities and contributing to a Quality Assurance (QA) system for Higher Education in Vietnam", starting in 2005. Profqim project worked on Ministry level as well as university level. Its specific objectives were: 1) Develop and set up Quality Assurance Centers at 5 selected universities which were Thai Nguyen University, Vinh University, Hue University, Da Nang University, and Can Tho University; 2) Contribute to the Ministry of Education & Training (MoET) in the

development of the Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Vietnam that will maintain and improve the quality of education and training.

When Profqim was carried out in March 2005, HEP 1 was already under way (Westerheijden et al, 2010). Therefore, in order to create a link between Profqim and HEP1, a project of piloting external evaluation was executed in 12 universities in Vietnam. The outcomes of the project were integrated into the Profqim project with the aim to revise national standards and criteria for the accreditation in Vietnam's higher education and to draft the instructions of how to implement these standards and criteria at institutional level. Profqim was terminated in 2008. With the assistance of Profqim, MoET developed a set of standards and criteria for the use of accreditation nation-wide. At university level, quality assurance centers were established at different levels.

Needless to say, having been giving loans and providing assistance in capacity development for quality improvement and assurance in Vietnam's higher education, these international projects play a supporting role in setting up quality assurance system in Vietnam. More importantly, thanks to these international inspirations, Vietnamese higher education system has experienced in practice quality assurance at university level and accreditation practices at system level. QACs were first established at 5 universities (Thai Nguyen, Hue, Vinh, Da Nang, Can Tho). All these QACs developed their own regulations relating to quality assurance as well as annual work plans (Duong, 2010). In addition, with the support from HEP 2 for QAC network, later more QACs have been established in many other universities. By July 2009, 110 out of 160 universities established QACs, with a number having their own websites (Duong, 2010).

However, after the supports of these international projects, whether Vietnam's universities can adapt the experience from these international projects to develop their own IQA system, or in other words, whether these international projects can really help Vietnam's universities make use of IQA system to benefit the universities in enhancing educational quality are still very questionable. Deriving from that fact, in order to define where the Vietnam's higher education is in the quality assurance process after receiving capacity support from HEP 1, Profqim and HEP 2 as well as in order to see the effect of these projects; a thorough evaluation of the extent to which IQA implementation in Vietnam's universities has been influenced by these international projects is urgently needed.

1.4 Research questions:

Based on aforementioned fact, this research will be conducted in order to study the effect of international projects, including HEP 1, Profqim and HEP 2 on the internal quality assurance (IQA) implementation in Vietnam's universities. The research questions that guide this study will be grouped into two sets:

- Central question:
 - o To what extent the international projects (ProfQim, HEP1, HEP2) influence IQA implementation in Vietnam's higher education?
- Sub-questions:
 - o Are there any differences in IQA implementation among Universities in Vietnam, regarding the support from international projects?
 - o Which factors influence the IQA implementation among Universities in Viet Nam?

1.5 Purpose of the study:

The general objective of this research is to examine to see whether there are differences in implementing quality assurance system in public universities who got the training and support from Profqim, HEP1 and HEP2 projects, as compared with the public and private universities who have to establish the system by their own. This study will also further investigate the factors that may support or hinder the universities to

implement IQA. At the end, this study is expected to learn about the extent that the support from international projects has influence on IQA implementation among universities in Vietnam.

1.6 Significance of the study

Quality assurance is always the main concern of Vietnam's higher education. During the past 10 years, the Government of Vietnamese (GOV) has made big effort in setting up an appropriate quality assurance system in order to manage the quality issue in Vietnam's higher education. Those efforts on quality assurance issue of the GOV have received the supports from 3 main international projects -HEP 1, Profqim and HEP2 under Nuffic and World Bank organizations, which are considered as international organizations. There are quite many empirical researches on the role of such international organizations on the development of higher education system in developing countries like Vietnam. However, studies on how these international supports in terms of knowledge, finance or capacity building have been applied or used in the beneficiary countries afterwards seems to be negligible. Therefore, generally in this present research, the study on the extent that the international projects influence the IQA implementation in Vietnam's universities may contribute some evidences on whether the support of international organizations can really help the beneficiary countries adapt to their current and future challenges.

In the case of quality assurance issue in Vietnam's higher education, this comparison may also help the universities define where they are on the process of IQA implementation, leading to the possibility that Vietnamese Government will have a good orientation for the next research on the issue of quality assurance. Furthermore, the findings of the factors that influence the implementation of internal quality assurance in Vietnam's higher education may help educational policy makers in setting appropriate regulations to better manage the quality issue in Vietnam's higher education system.

Besides, by comparing the implementation of IQA among universities and investigating IQA influential factors, this research especially serves as an empirical study for the needs of the Vietnam Private University Association (VIUPA). VIUPA was established in 2004 with the aim to support the private higher education institutions in Vietnam. For some current problems, for example, the rumor of poor quality in teaching or the inconsistencies in quality management in private universities, VIUPA always has to find solutions for the issue of quality control in order to help these universities survive and gain back the trust from students. Particularly, in November 2011, VIUPA established a project named "Quality assurance courses for universities and colleges through blended learning" to help the universities members improve their capability in quality assurance. In this project, they will train the attended universities to conduct the activities relating to quality issue. Therefore, this research will help the project define the conditions needed for and the influential factors towards the development of institutional quality assurance system in the context of Vietnam; so that the project can effectively support its beneficiaries through the training.

Chapter 2

2. Conceptual framework of the study:

This chapter will review the concepts, definitions and related literature that contributed to the conceptualization of this study. Accordingly, the variables in this study will be explicitly examined. In addition, the conceptual framework of the study will be presented and the definitions of variables in this framework will also be discussed at the end of this chapter.

2.1 Internal quality assurance:

2.1.1 Definition of internal quality assurance (IQA):

Internal quality assurance is kind of a buzzword among many higher education institutions (Boele, 2007). Even with those who have a strong desire to introduce an effective system of internal quality assurance in their institutions, developing an effective system of internal quality assurance is still a big question to quite many educational managers nowadays.

Views on IQA are varied, not least because Universities are often at different stages of IQA development. Additionally, there are also many definitions of internal quality assurance from authors to authors; however, it is believed that they are more or less similar in the concepts.

As defined by in the study conducted by Martin and Stella (2007), IQA is referred to “the policies and mechanisms implemented in an institution or program to ensure that it is fulfilling its own purposes and meeting the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular”. Herein, it can be understood that an institution has to implement quality policies and quality mechanism in order to meet the quality standards imposed in higher education in general or required by the profession or discipline in particular.

IQA was briefly defined in ADDA (2010) that “in the specific context of higher education institutions, IQA is the totality of systems, resources and information devoted to setting up, maintaining and improving the quality and standards of teaching, scholarship (student learning experience), research, and service to community.” Likewise, González (2008) elaborately reviewed IQA systems as the systems which “are aimed at enabling the institutions to manage and control their quality-related core activities”. It can be referred from those definitions that the University is responsible for establishing a system based on institutional resources to manage quality-related activities and ensure quality improvement in institutions.

Summing up, from the above definitions, IQA in general can be defined as the overall management system which is implemented in the University to carry out the quality policy for ensuring that University fulfill its purpose and meet the standards set by external elements.

2.1.2 The relationship of internal quality assurance with external quality assurance and accreditation in quality assurance system:

Definition of IQA was elaborated in the previous part, which seemed to implicitly show that the responsibility to establish IQA system is primarily placed in the hands of higher education institutions for their desires to achieve quality standards. In this section, the questions follow are what are the relationship between IQA and the external quality assurance arrangements and what are their roles to the issue of quality in the University.

As defined, while internal quality assurance ensures that an institution has policies and mechanisms in place to make sure that it is meeting its own purpose and standards, external quality assurance refers to the actions of an external body outside the institution that evaluate the operation of the institution, its system or its program in order to determine whether it meets the agreed upon or predetermined standards (AUN,

2010). Apparently, it can be seen that the actor of internal quality assurance activities is the institution, and the main actor of external quality assurance is the body or organization outside the institution.

It was stated by Mishra (2006) that in order to encourage the internal quality arrangements, accreditation as external quality assurance is preferred by most of the countries in the world. Many countries use external quality assessment as an important instrument to monitor the quality of higher education institutions, add value to quality assessment, and attach the credibility to the objective quality assurance system (Mishra, 2006). However, it is argued that assuring quality should be a continuous process, and it should not be considered as a one-time activity for accreditation alone (Mishra, 2006). Therefore, despite the importance of external quality assurance and the credibility it can bring to the impartial system, developing an internal quality assurance mechanism is considered more important to assure the quality of educational institutions. As stated by Hanft and Kohler (2008), Universities have a major responsibility for assuring the quality of “teaching, research and internal organization”, it is important that each University develop its own effective system of IQA.

In sum, from the above explanation for the relationship between IQA and accreditation as well as external quality assessment, it can be referred that internal quality assurance is something that the University which has commitment to its quality should seriously take into account regardless of whether it is expected to be accredited or not. Therefore, IQA should exist even in the absence of accreditation.

2.2 Implementation of internal quality assurance:

In the light of its nature, internal quality assurance ensures that an institution has policies and mechanisms in place to make sure that it is meeting its own purpose and standards. More elaborately, the fundamentals of IQA system consist of the clear goals and objectives at organizational level as well as at program level, the support in implementing all the objectives, the regular quality evaluation, and the clear procedures and support with regard to the follow-up of evaluation activities (Berrings et al, 2010).

Accordingly, the process of internal quality assurance in Universities can be distinguished into these following phases: defining institutional mission and strategic goals and knowing what quality means in the light of its own goals, setting up processes to ensure that quality is reached and to monitor progress in this regard, and finally being able to react when all is not well, or being able and willing to improve continuously even when things seem to be working properly (Loukkola & Zhang, 2010). Furthermore, in order to be well operated, this process always needs a support from the specially established institutional structure to make the internal quality processes more systematic (Reichert, 2008). In this regard, according to Materu (2007), the establishment of a quality assurance center in each higher education institution will provide a central focus and contact point for institutional accreditation, audits or program evaluation. Additionally, it is also expected to create “a base of information and institutional memory” from one accreditation to the next, facilitate staff training, coordinate implementation of quality recommendation, or even it can help foster a culture of quality in institution. For this point, the formation of a quality assurance center is necessary to support the operation of quality assurance processes in institution.

Therefore, the implementation of internal quality assurance at institutional level can be defined as the development of quality assurance process and establishment of the quality assurance structure to support the implementation of this process in Universities.

2.2.1 Internal quality assurance process:

As defined, the process of internal quality assurance is aimed to enable an institution to manage and control its quality-related activities. However, the question of what should be included in this process in order to manage the quality and hopefully improve the quality is not easy to answer due to the complexity in terms of defining quality management in higher education institutions.

According to Mishra (2006), the real academic life of a higher education institution mainly happens in the processes of teaching and research. Mishra (2006) further stated that many problems often occur when it comes to the management of this part. The reason he gave out is that lecturers have all academic freedom and autonomy to perform their duties in the manner they think should be. For example, the Principal can suggest something to teachers; but fact shows that it is up to the teachers to accept and apply it in the classroom. In this context, Mishra (2006) argued that the “management of quality remains a community effort and not necessarily a role of senior management or the principal alone”. In the view of this, the role of leader is to disseminate the idea of quality to all the teachers in the way that “they can take ownership” and commit themselves to new initiatives (Mishra, 2006). For this point, the concept of continuous improvement is highly significant as it can help to clarify the internal processes of an institution and more importantly debate its activities in the quality framework.

Looking at the concept of continuous improvement, it was revealed that continuous improvement is an intervention to stop the normal process, where everything is deteriorated in the time of being used, and increase the quality. The process of continuous improvement is known as P-D-C-A cycle developed by Deming (1999). The four major steps of the process are as follows:

- P (plan): gathering the data to identify and define the issue that need improvements and identify ways to achieve them
- D (do): implementing the plan
- C (check): analyzing the results to see if there is good arrangement between the original goals and what was actually achieved
- A (act): depending on the results from the check, acting on the plan (Temponi, 2005).

According to Mishra (2006), this cycle of P-D-C-A is in line with all models of quality assurance, and this is also a right fit for a higher education institution. With this respect, it can be referred that the core activities in quality assurance in an institution is the establishment of P-D-C-A cycle. Therefore, as defined in EUA (2009), it is stated that internal quality assurance process should include all the activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of the university from strategic planning to staff and curriculum development.

More specifically, according to Vroeijsenstijn (1995), in order to assure quality, it is necessary to establish a structured quality assurance system that makes it possible to monitor quality, to evaluate quality and to improve the quality. As argued by him, there is no one model that fits all; and it is up to the University to decide which model fits it best. However, there are some basic conditions that have to be fulfilled in developing an IQA process. At least, the IQA system should cover the P-D-C-A Deming cycle and should be equipped with the basic elements for monitoring, evaluation and improvement (AUN, 2010).

Generally, there is no one IQA system that is applicable to all universities. Each University has to build its own system; therefore the University is encouraged to adopt a tailored-made approach that derives from institutional strategic goals and fits into institutional culture to meet the internal requirement as well as external requirement in the process. The internal quality assurance process with a tailor made approach contains four basic elements, developed by Vroeijsenstijn (1995), as follows:

- Institutional goals
- Monitoring instruments
- Evaluation instruments
- Improvement of quality

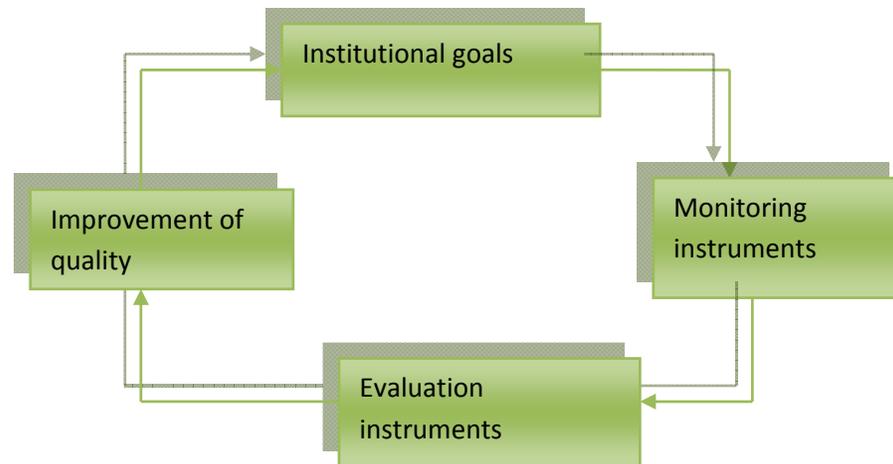


Figure 1: Internal quality assurance adopted from Vroeijsstijn (1995)

2.2.1.1 Institutional goals

Vroeijsstijn (1995) defined goals and aims of the institution or faculty as “the frame of reference for the quality assurance”. Therefore, according to him, institutional goals and aims must be formulated clearly and must meet scientific and societal requirement. Additionally, institutional goals and aims should also reflect the requirement of different stakeholders. In other words, the requirement of stakeholders should be clearly embedded into institutional goals, the objectives of faculty or educational programs.

2.2.1.2 Monitoring instrument

As the main purpose of monitoring quality is to act as catalyst for quality enhancement, a good monitoring system is considered essential to the process of internal quality assurance (Vroeijsstijn, 1995). As mentioned in the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2005), the quality assurance of programs are always expected to include monitoring of the progress and achievement of students. Monitoring system contains the information that higher education institutions collect and store by themselves, reflecting how the information feeds into internal discussion and decision making process, and how institutions communicate on the basis of this information. Schereens et al (2003) also confirmed that the term “monitoring” is seen as the association with ongoing information gathers as the basic for management decisions, a reliance on administrative data and a strong preoccupation with description than with valuing. Schereens and his colleagues (2003) have listed out 3 main motives for creating a monitoring system in education: to formally regulate desired levels of quality of education outcomes and provision; to hold educational service providers accountable; and to support ongoing improvement in education.

In the similar vein, Vroeijsstijn (1995) confirmed the necessity to set up a good monitoring system to collect information about the quality of University’s activities. As argued by him, by using monitoring instruments, institution can follow input, process and output. As a result, institution or faculty can keep track of the performance and developments in institution and can take action whenever necessary. It is mentioned in the AUN (2010) that a good monitoring system should include:

- student progress
- pass rates and dropout rates
- outcomes of the structured feedback from employers
- outcomes of the structured feedback from alumni

2.2.1.3 Evaluation instrument

Evaluation is the most important link in the process of internal quality assurance (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Self-assessment, or self-evaluation, seems to be introduced in higher education due to external assessment or accreditation. Therefore, an institution is expected to conduct at least every 5 years, a self assessment of the University as a whole to figure out its strong and weak points. The result of self-assessment should be embedded in a self-evaluation report (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). In that case, the self-assessment will serve as preparation for and provide basic information for a visit from external experts (Kelly, 1993).

Apart from self assessment, which might be part of external quality assessment or accreditation process, institutional will be also expected to conduct the internal audit based on the self evaluation reports when the self assessment is not connected with the process of accreditation or external quality assessment (AUN, 2010).

In addition, beside self assessment conducted for accreditation process and internal audit conducted in the absence of accreditation, it is also suggested to include student evaluation, course evaluation and curriculum evaluation in the evaluation instruments (AUN, 2010).

- Student evaluation: In fact, this should be a regular activity in the institution to learn what students think about the program, the staff, the form of lecturing etc.
- Course evaluation: Although the students will evaluate the course during the student evaluation, there might also be a need to include other stakeholders.
- Curriculum evaluation: Other stakeholders have to be included for the evaluation of the curriculum (AUN, 2010)

2.2.1.4 Quality improvement: Closing the feedback loop

As could be seen, monitoring systems and internal evaluation are considered essential for improving activities and services and for planning future activities in an institution. The results of evaluations or the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses from self-assessment, therefore, are assumed to lead to the measures for quality improvement (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). In this view, evaluation results are seen as the feedback part of the process: it provides information about quality to the ones who are responsible for the improvement of quality in institution. For this point, in order for the internal quality assurance process to be effective, the evaluation feedback should be implemented by the institution. Implemented means, explained by Westerheijden & Maassen (1998), the higher education institution attains improvement of quality. This also means that institution should make improvement plan based on self-evaluation report to close the quality loops. In the study “Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond – Second ENQA Survey”, conducted in 2008, it suggested that the responsibility for the follow-up process is the matter which is generally carried by the higher education institutions.

Westerheijden and Maassen (1998) has distinguished three types of use (implementation) of evaluation results by decision-makers in higher education institution:

- Active use: institutional decisions are made based on evaluation outcomes
- Passive use: no decision are directly made based on evaluation outcomes, but these evaluation outcomes are acknowledged in the evaluated organization’s decision making processes, for example the spread-out of evaluation reports or there is a discussion about it, and
- No use

In fact, even though the importance of closing feedback loops has been emphasized by the number of quality assurance literature, there is a possibility that institutions are not formally responsible for the

follow-up, meaning they didn't implement the evaluation results. As stated in Visscher's study (2009), the review phase (closing the loops) is often the weakest phase despite its crucial importance. It is true that much attention has been paid on the assessment instruments and result analysis; however, relatively less attention has been given to using the results of assessments to achieve program improvements (Soundarajan, 2010).

Visscher (2009) cited the conclusion of Weiss (1998) on the (under-) utilization of evaluation outcomes that it's naïve to think that the new valuable information from self-assessment report is a sufficient precondition for triggering improvement-oriented behavior in institution. According to Wess (1998, cited by Visscher, 2009), new and relevant information is a valuable but insufficient precondition for triggering the improvement orientation in institutions. It is because the utilization of finding is something that needs to be done in addition to regular tasks, a strong motivation to improve performance is also important, likewise social support (e.g. from the boss and from other colleagues), and additional resources (Wess 1998, cited by Visscher, 2009) . Weiss also points to a number of ways in which the utilization of data can be obstructed:

- Evaluation results may not be disseminated among the target group;
- Users may not understand, or believe these;
- They may have no idea of how the results can be changed;
- And/or lack the skills, competences for utilizing the evaluation findings;
- The required changes may be too controversial to accomplish them

It is, therefore, necessary to call for the capacity building in helping staffs utilize the findings from self-assessment reports in order to get the quality loop closed.

Besides, the participant of student in closing the quality loops also very crucial. As Leckey and Neill (2001) argued, "closing the loop is an important issue in terms of total quality management. If students do not see any action resulting from their feedback, they may become skeptical and unwilling to participate". This point is illustrated with the situation mentioned in the report of Loukkola & Zang (2010) that "although students judge teachers' performances, they do not often see the results of this judgment, nor do they see how these results are used in teachers' assessments. Often students can only indirectly deduce that their feedback has led to additional training for the teachers or to farther reaching consequences." And according to Loukkola & Zang (2010), the lack of transparency in informing the students' feedback can then result in the consequence that students will not fill out new evaluation questionnaires and thus leave the institution without valuable feedback information.

Therefore, it could be concluded that in order to effectively close the quality loop for the purpose of quality improvement, in addition to the staff's capacity building in utilizing evaluation result so that the evaluation result can be beneficial to institution, staff and students also need to be informed the extent to which their feedbacks were used for improvement-oriented activities in the institution.

In conclusion, summarizing from four basic elements contained in the process of assuring internal quality, there are 6 characteristics that should be taken into account when considering the implementation of quality assurance system in institutions (Surssock, 2011): 1) clearly defining their strategic goals; 2) defining the ways to achieve them; 3) analyzing carefully what kind of information they – or their key stakeholders – need to monitor their performance; 4) limiting the collection of data to information that can truly be utilized; 5) paying particular attention to the transparency of this data as well as to 6) the involvement of internal stakeholders in the follow-up procedures to sustain their commitment and motivation.

2.2.2 Quality assurance center: Structure and function

The growth of concern to demonstrate the quality of higher education's provision has pressed the institutions to implement the accreditation policy imposed by the government (Yorke, 2000). Beside the requirement of the establishment of an accreditation agency, this policy also requires the set of institutionalized processes, in which universities must learn how and when to prepare their self-evaluation reports (Westerheijden et al, 2010). Those requirements have led institutions to establish quality assurance centers to support the quality assurance system to function at local level.

Quality assurance center is established as a management support unit with quality assurance staffs to be responsible for quality assurance in different faculties and departments of the university. With the contribution to development of quality system and plan in institution, quality assurance center is needed to maintain coherence in the university and bring the needed professionalism into quality assurance (Westerheijden et al, 2010).

Additionally, developing an evaluation framework for institutions, and providing them with instruments and handbooks for the self-evaluation which cover the questions addressing all elements needed to inform the accreditation process (Westerheijden et al, 2010), quality assurance center supports the self evaluation process of the departments or the university as a whole. It can also assist the organizational units or institution to recognize the nature of the expectations which are laid upon them and to prepare for the form of external quality inspection which is about to be visited on them (Yorke, 2000). Furthermore, for the role in institutional data collection and analysis to support institutional planning and management and quality assurance processes (Sursock, 2011), the quality assurance center in university also plays a role in assisting institutions to monitor effectively.

The quality assurance center is located centrally and serves the function of an internal auditor and reports directly to the highest body and the head of institution, in order to close the feedback loops and feed into the planning and decision-making processes (EUA, 2003). Normally, the closing of a PDCA-cycle is the responsibility of the owners of the processes and products involved. Therefore, Rectors, Deans of schools, Heads of department etc. are those who are responsible and accountable for the area and level of their authority.

Quality assurance center is, therefore, structured as an independent unit, operating autonomously within the university and just shares the supportive role in decisions on quality management at the university:

- It contributes to the development of quality system and plan
- It supports the University in the process of conducting self evaluation
- It checks and evaluates QA activities in the university regularly, to draw and share experiences across the whole university
- It assists faculties, departments, institutes, centers and other units in data collection, analysis and interpretation through offering workshops on these subjects.

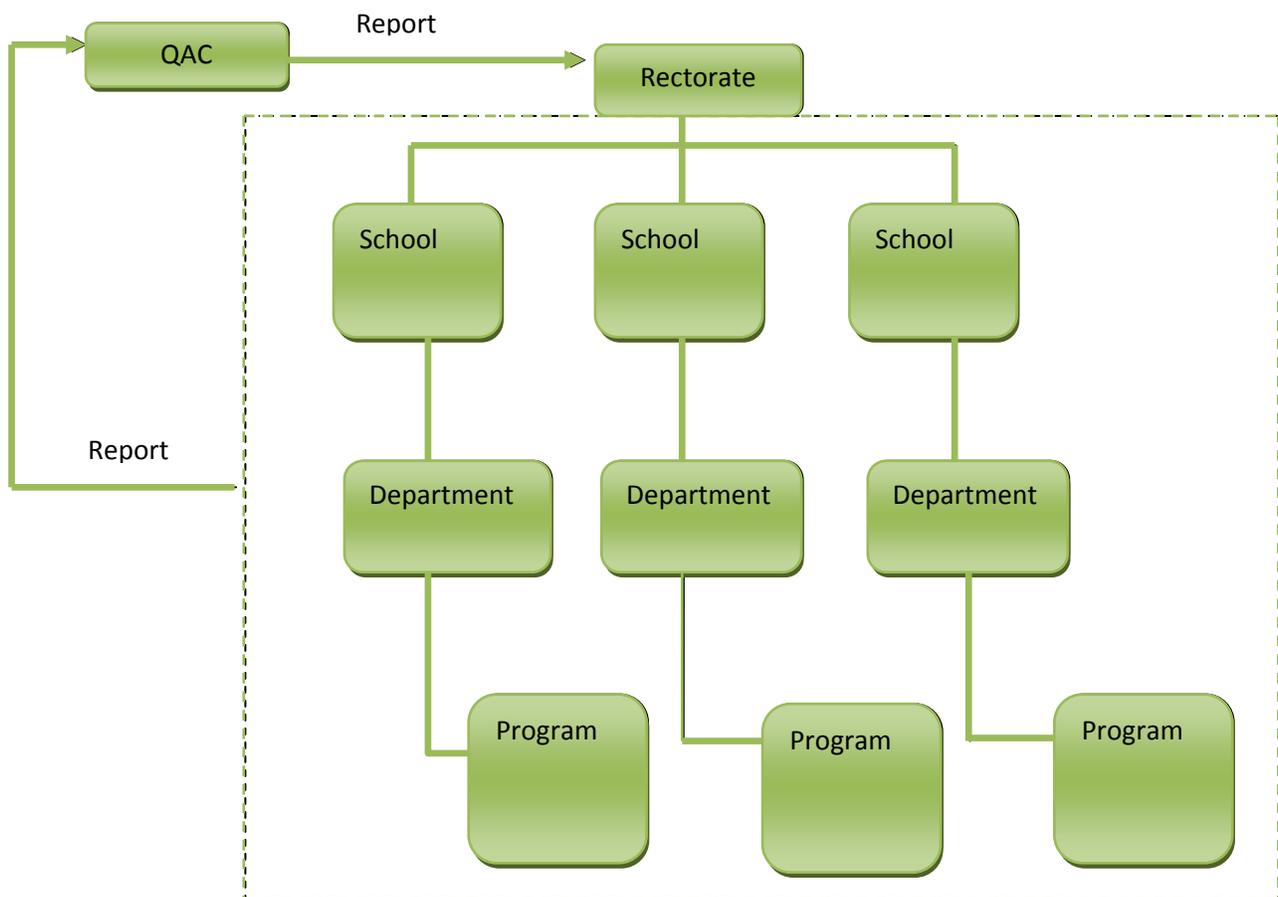


Figure 2: The position of QAC

In general, quality assurance center has responsibility for providing information to the university management in building the university's mission, strategy plan and developing the quality assurance system of the university; supporting the university management in constructing a quality assurance; supporting the management to develop and implement quality assurance plans and quality assurance activities; and adding up to an evaluation calendar for the respective levels. For its responsibility in institution, Sursock (2011) has identified five primary functions of QAC:

- Supportive role and providing expertise: the quality assurance officer visits faculty regularly and provide expertise in developing their quality assurance processes.
- Coordination role: particularly when there is a process of evaluations that is organized by the university or when the process of evaluation is devolved to faculties.
- Interpretative role: quality assurance officers interpret the national quality assurance requirements so as to adapt them to the institutional context
- Monitoring role: The office provides instructions, collects information, point out the problems, but does not get involved in solving them.
- Administrative role: organizing and preparing external evaluation visits or processing institutional questionnaires

2.3 Factors that influence the IQA implementation:

In the past 10 years, internal quality processes have been a major development for 60% of institutions in Europe (Sursock & Smidt, 2010). Indeed, quality assurance is the primary responsibility of the universities, and it has cost experts much effort on trying to examine its nature, the effective internal quality process and the influential factors that affect its implementation at local level.

The review of the success factors that can promote the internal quality assurance process in this study will be limited and characterized into three dimensions: organizational structure, organizational capacity and contextual factors.

2.3.1 Organizational structure:

One of the key influential factors for a well-functioning internal quality assurance system is the appropriate organizational structures for quality assurance, particularly the devolution of responsibility and the degree of centralization in the university. (EUA, 2006; Sursock, 2011; & Battle, 2011)

As indicated in the final report of the quality assurance for the higher education change agenda project (EUA, 2009), quality assurance activities should not be considered as a separate activity of specific person(s), but that concern for quality should be the responsibility of everyone in the university. There are not only the senior managers responsible for the institutional quality but also there should be the involvement of staff and even students. According to Sursock (2011), this perception of participation in institutional quality is linked to definitions of democracy and affects the way quality process is introduced into the institution. This situation leads to the assumption that the University structure with clear responsibilities and accountability lines at all levels of the university will ensure the quality assurance process to be simple and easy for closing all the feedback loops (Sursock, 2011).

Harvey & Green (1993) also emphasized the importance of the devolution of responsibility for quality in institution. According to them, the organization is reduced to a system of interrelated nodes, and it is the responsibility of each node of an organization to ensure that its outputs fit the required inputs of receiver nodes. Likewise, at institutional level, Meal (1995) mentioned the devolved responsibility of the senior managers for the university's basic organization unit (alternatively the faculty), and each faculty is responsible for a portfolio of courses, research programs and community services. Quality is thus assured at each stage in the production or delivery (Harvey & Green, 1993), or in other words, at each level of the institution.

Sursock (2011) explained the devolution of responsibility in internally assuring quality as the situation that the responsibilities is devolved to the lowest possible level and that the senior management team will just involved only in case of serious problems. In other words, it is the combination of bottom-up responsibilities and top-down steers.

The example of devolved responsibilities for implementing quality assurance internally was clearly illustrated in the Trend Report (2010). It was said that the common institutional element of successful IQA implementation is that one member of the institutional leadership, normally the rector or vice rector, is responsible for the overall implementation process, and the quality process at the faculty level will be in charged by either new coordinating group or existing institutional committee. Sursock (2010) also stated that "in the advanced stage of implementation, the most intense time investment happened at faculty level where the deans or vice-deans played the leading coordinating and managerial role", which means the role of deans , in this case, will then be integrated in the top management teams rather than be merely the representative of their faculty. And according to him, this trend can strengthen institutional strategies and institutional accountability, leading to an effective use of quality assurance results in institutions. Indeed,

it was firmly argued by Sursock (2011) that quality assurance mechanisms can only be developed if responsibilities are shared and accountability lines are clear at local level.

Another element of organizational structure which can affect the implementation of IQA is the degree of centralization in organization. A quality structure can be organized at the central institutional level but it can also be organized in a decentralized way (EUA, 2006). It may be assumed that each type of structure will have different advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, again, the major question is whether the quality system should be defined centrally, implemented from top down and monitored in order to ensure their fully functioning, or rather there should be a negotiation among different actors and stakeholders in deciding the quality system. Since quality system will only be well-functioning if it is well managed by actors in institution, therefore, such question in the degree of decentralization seems to be important.

Decentralized systems rely on sharing decision-making power and monitoring duties to the ones who establish quality within a university (e.g. teachers, researchers, students, administrators) (Lueger & Vettori, 2008). Lueger and Vettori (2008) also stated that, with this approach, quality standards are mainly regarded as a participative instrument for organizational development oriented towards “flexibility”. Therefore, decentralized structures have the advantage of ensuring a greater sense of ownership locally; however, there will be a tendency that these structures could end up working at cross purposes in terms of the whole institution (EUA, 2006).

In the meanwhile, the centralized quality assurance systems often establish rules based on the standards set by external stakeholders. One popular means of achieving this centralized quality system is the implementation of threshold-standards as the minimum basis for future improvements in institution (Lueger and Vettori, 2008). However, as argued by Sursock (2011), it is essential that students and staff feel at home in their faculties and departments, which argues for “an optimal balance between the need for a strong institutional core and a degree of faculty responsibilities, between the need for an institution-wide QA approach and some local variations in faculties”. In other words, quality system should be defined centrally but flexibly so that each faculty and department can supplement the main system with its own guidelines, and thus ensuring the ownership. With that way, the university members can develop local strategies of quality assurance and quality improvement based on the overall strategic framework. According to Lueger and Vettori (2008), within such a framework, while the “good-practice-standards and broad-objective-standards” can provide orientation, the minimum-threshold-standards would be more “process-oriented”, leading to the development of local strategies without giving up a purely formal approach.

Therefore, in terms of decision-making structures for an effective internal quality assurance, it is advisable that the institutions should seek the balance between centralization and decentralization, which “should be based on notions of institutional effectiveness and a clear internal division of responsibilities” as suggested by EUA (2003). The optimal balance between centralization and decentralization in deciding the institutional quality system will be beneficial in helping institutions set the overall institutional strategy while the faculties develop their own strategies in close articulation with the institutional vision (EUA, 2003).

Thus the organizational structure, particularly the degree of centralization and the devolution of responsibility in the university were just proved to be one of the factors that can affect IQA implementation in institution. These two elements can also be related to perception of bureaucracy and democracy, which requires the balance in quality management at local level.

2.3.2 Organizational capacity:

It is said that even though quality assurance system is never built from scratch, the usual implementation process is a linear one (Vettori and Lueger, 2010): new tools and procedures are developed and therefore some conditions are needed in order to support organization to adapt to these new tools and procedures. In

terms of the organizational capacity, the commitment of the institution's leadership, the well organized data collection and analysis (staff's expertise), and resources are assumed as institutional influential factors that can promote the process of internal quality system (EUA, 2006).

Leadership in institution is emphasized as a very important factor influencing the success of quality assurance process. Leadership is needed to explain the essential of internal quality processes and to create the conditions for introducing the processes by clarifying the responsibilities, developing frameworks and ensuring the appropriate follow up of internally organized quality reviews. EUA (2006) has addressed four important functions of the institutional leadership as follows: setting the overall institutional strategy and coordinating its implementation, promoting and communicating quality culture, developing relations with the staff and monitoring quality.

Since the senior leadership is in charge of the strategic direction of the institutions, it is responsible for setting guidelines to guide the activities of staff in the institution. After setting the basic strategies, the leadership's task is to promote and communicate the strategy, quality goal and related decision to staff members, students and external stakeholders. The leadership also needed to create conditions for quality culture in institution and to ensure that staff members can perform well in a way that is in line with the values of the organization. The fourth central task of the senior leadership, which has been highlighted in EUA (2006), is to monitor quality and integrate quality monitoring results in the decision-making process of the institution (EUA, 2006).

Sursock (2011) stated that leadership is essential to provide University with the initial steer and the broad frameworks of quality assurance mechanisms. According to Sursock (2011), leadership is needed to facilitate internal debate in order to trigger the intrinsic motivation to implement internal quality assurance and to make sure that quality assurance processes do not end up being bolted on. Additionally, as mentioned in EUA (2006), the ambiguity and the multi-facet mission of institution which might lead to contradictory strategy is a specific challenge for higher education institutions; therefore it is crucial to implement the institutional leadership to formulate, discuss and communicate clear priorities and guidelines and includes them in the institutional overall policy plan.

However, leadership is not only needed at the senior management level. Because of the fact that quality assurance process actually mainly happens at faculty level, the commitment of bottom-up leadership will play a more important role in sustaining the process of internal quality system. From the top, the senior leadership (rector/vice rector) will be responsible for initial steer like monitoring, making decisions or facilitating the process, and the lower-level leadership (dean) will take the lead in developing the quality system process. Therefore, as argued by Sursock (2011), in order to manage the process of quality assurance in institutions effectively, it is crucial that the leadership – at all levels of the university – is pulling in the same direction and “able to persuade the staff that they are important players in achieving the strategic orientation of the institution”.

Furthermore, the issue of information is also considered as very important to the success of quality assurance process in university (EUA 2006). Therefore, it is believed that the staff's expertise in quality assurance is vital in allowing the institution to monitor effectively the areas of strengths and weaknesses and to develop the appropriate actions in response to the university's requirement. Accordingly, quality assurance officers are required to have capability in collecting and analyzing the key institutional data in order to support institutional planning and management and quality assurance processes.

In addition to the factors of leadership and staff's expertise in data collection and analysis, the availability of financial and human resources (including staff development scheme) is also an influential factor towards the implementation of internal quality assurance. Witte (2008) indicated that quality assurance costs resources. Particularly, the institutional commitment to the issue of quality requires a continuous investment in financial and human resources (EUA, 2006).

As quality assurance must be taken as a concern by all staff members, it is important to invest in staff development in order to avoid internal quality assurance arrangements becoming punitive (Sursock, 2011;

EUA, 2003). In the self-evaluation process at institutional level, there may be a situation that staff may feel threatened if the evaluation is perceived as an appraisal process rather than an opportunity for improving performance; therefore, professional development programs in this case can help staff gain confidence and trust in their institution, and avoid that staff may perceive quality process as a threat to individual career development (EUA, 2003).

Additionally, for providing staff with assistance in improving their teaching or introducing innovative pedagogies, professional development schemes can ensure that staff will perceive quality assurance process as useful rather than just sanction (as may be seen by them when doing self-evaluation) for failures (Sursock, 2011). For this point, professional development is considered as a major requirement for enhancing the quality of staff and raising their quality awareness so that the quality assurance process can be implemented effectively at local level. Staff development schemes may include training to develop skills and increase the motivation of staff.

However, the problem is how to implement staff development schemes in an integrated and coherent way so that when quality culture is introduced and quality process is implemented, staff will perceive the quality issue of their institutions as being part of a framework that can benefit everyone (EUA, 2003). Another challenge in the area of staff development is that it is quite expensive because it always requires appropriate human and financial resources, and even some changes in equipment and facilities. Therefore, some institutions cannot pay much attention on this issue, causing some barriers for internally implementing the process of quality system effectively.

It was also concluded in EUA (2006) that the lack of funding for quality measurement will cause the institutional mission to remain unfulfilled. Adding more burdens, Reichert (2008) mentioned that the resources should be reserved for the quality review process and for implementing the recommendations as well. And more importantly, the resources for the improvements should be significantly higher than the resources for the review processes (Reichert, 2008). Therefore, as mentioned in the study of EUA (2006), since the investment in quality is vital for higher education institution, and in order to reduce the cost, the scope of the review should be reduced accordingly.

In summary, the organization capacity factor that can have an impact on the implementation of quality assurance process in institutions can be characterized as: leadership, staff's expertise and resources.

2.3.3 Contextual factors:

Besides being potentially influenced by the factors of organizational structure and capacity, the differences in IQA implementation among universities may partly ascribed to contextual factors.

Since higher education has many characteristics, public policy always wants to seek to determine some of these characteristics for certain performance expectation (Blackmur, 2007). In the meanwhile, quality assurance, as analyzed by Blackmur (2007) involves the process that the interested party may seek confidence on the desired quality. Therefore, according to Blackmur (2007), there will be a problem of defining and setting standards in the regulation of higher education quality, leading to the confusion on whether the quality regulation is conducted by the Government or by universities or by the combination of both. Accordingly, the quality assurance seems not to be implemented effectively in institutions. Likewise, in the case of quality assurance of Vietnam's higher education, it is assumed that the top down system of IQA in Vietnam, which is implied in the obligation policy imposed on the large number of institutions to establish the quality assurance centers, may just result in the extrinsic motivation of institutions to implement IQA system. In other words, due to the pressure from the Government, the implementation of IQA in institutions stems from the need to meet the requirement of MOET, not from an intrinsic motivation for continuous improvement in institutions. Consequently, the role of IQA in institutions may not be understood as the way it is supposed to be, leading to the ineffective implementation of quality assurance at local level.

Additionally, as argued by Materu (2007), the availability of competent professional QA staffs potentially affects the effective quality assurance in institution. The need for QA training in the University is highly mentioned in AUN (2010) as one of the factors that can help the University set up an effective QA system. According to Materu (2007), for the importance of QA knowledge, it is necessary to include training of “self evaluators and peer reviewer who would also be available to serve in accreditation set up by national QA agencies” to support Universities in developing a strong internal quality assurance system. Furthermore, it is also suggested that the national agencies should support the development of quality assurance at institutional level by providing “methodologies, methods, standards and organization models for use by universities in their internal quality assurance process” in order to help Universities to implement the accreditation requirements set by the Government. Based on that fact, the degree of training that universities receive in terms of conducting internal quality assurance is assumed to be the second contextual factor that may cause the differences in IQA implementation among Vietnam’s higher education institutions.

Furthermore, accreditation often comes with institutional autonomy (Westerheijden et al, 2010). Therefore, the last factor in organization capacity that possibly influences the IQA implementation is the institution’s degree of autonomy.

Institutional autonomy is the precondition for promoting internal quality (EUA, 2003). According to Sursock (2011), institutional autonomy is one of the key factors in the capacity of institutions to define quality and the purposes of their internal quality assurance processes in order to develop quality monitoring of their activities in a meaningful way. This will imply “a stable funding and legal environment and the capacity for managing staff”, as mentioned in EUA (2003). Reichert (2008) affirmed the importance of institutional autonomy by saying that “institutional reviews presuppose a sufficient degree of institutional autonomy, otherwise the recommendations and action plans which they are likely to bring forward cannot be realized”. According to Reichert (2008), if institutional autonomy is given, it can effectively contribute to “professionalization of university leadership and management”

Tight (1992, cited by Hayden & Lam, 2007) elaborated six specific freedoms associated with institutional autonomy: freedom to be self-governing; freedom to exercise corporate financial control; freedom to make their own staffing decisions; freedom to select their own students; freedom to decide on their own curriculum; and freedom to assess and certify the academic performance of their own students. In the context of Vietnamese’s higher education, the extent to which they lack institutional autonomy is clear when some of the freedoms identified by Tight are considered (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

Hayden & Lam (2007) analyzed that the political importance of the Communist Party of Vietnam should be taken into account when recognizing a right to autonomy for higher education institutions in Vietnam. At institutional level, the Party committee can potentially disapprove any decision taken by a governing council or rector (Hayden & Lam, 2007). Therefore, according to them, in this environment, caution in making decisions is always needed in order to maintain the Party approval, even with legislated institutional autonomy. This leads to the fact that it’s difficult to see how the governing councils in institution could practice “authentic institutional autonomy” (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

Another problem existing in the issue of autonomy in Vietnam’s higher education is that there is no clear regular framework consistent with the right to autonomy for higher education institutions. Hayden & Lam (2007) gave two illustrative examples.

First, there is the issue of who will determine the curriculum frameworks. MoET has approved these frameworks for all programs of study across the sector. Accordingly, higher education institutions may expect to be able to approve their own curriculum frameworks; however, these institutions actually couldn’t exercise their freedom to decide on their own curriculum frameworks because:

“there has been no official foreshadowing of this possibility in either HERA or Cabinet Resolution 14, both of which documents were written to have effect up to 2020” (Hayden & Lam, 2007)

At present, the only two universities having freedom to decide on their own curriculum are two national universities, meaning they are able to be self-accrediting, thanks to the particular status given by the State.

Second is the issue of who will set tuition fees. At present, at least for all regular full-time higher education programs, the State sets tuition fees, including ceiling levels for tuition fees charged by private-sector institutions (Hayden & Lam, 2007). Accordingly, under the conditions of institutional autonomy, governing councils might just be able to give suggestion in the setting of tuition fees for their institutions. However, the higher education institutions now are permitted to set tuition fees for non-regular (mainly part-time and evening) programs of study. Additionally, the State also allows more freedom for the private sector of higher education in the sense that in future, they might be able to have greater flexibility in the setting of tuition fees. (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

In terms of freedom to make their own staffing decision and freedom to select their own students, Vietnamese higher education institutions have freedom to appoint their own staffs and select their own student, but have to depend on the quotas set by the State. This causes some troubles to the private-sector institutions because they always have to struggle to get enough students in order to survive. If they cannot get enough students, their program must be closed according to the Educational Law.

In short, it is believed that the issue of autonomy in the context of Vietnamese higher education may influence the way the institutions implement their quality systems.

2.4 Description of the model:

As it can be seen from the model (

Figure 3), the IQA implementation at the Universities includes the establishment of quality assurance center and the QA process. The center for quality assurance is located centrally in the University and serves the function of supporting QA process in the University as the whole. With respect to QA process, it should contain four basic QA elements of formulation of goals and aims, monitoring instrument, evaluation instrument and quality improvement, which enable an institution to meet the internal as well as external quality objectives and foster the continuous quality improvement. Therefore, in order to investigate the IQA implementation in Vietnam's University, this study attempted to have a close look on the position and functions of quality assurance center and examine all elements of QA processes that are being carried out in the Universities.

IQA implementation in the Universities can be influenced by various factors. This study mainly reviews 3 factors: organizational structure, organizational capacity and contextual factors. In the context of this study, the organizational structure includes the devolution of responsibility and degree of centralization in the University. Besides, it is likely that effective quality assurance depends on human capacity, particularly the demand on crucial role of leadership and staffs' expertise in QA. Additionally, the scarcity in resources, especially the constrain of funding, is also believed to affect the success of quality assurance in higher education institutions. As a result, those 3 elements (leadership, staffs' expertise and resources) under the organizational capacity were taken into account in this study. Last but not least, in the context of Vietnam's quality assurance, where the involvement of international QA projects partly play an essential role in the development of QA system, degree of training in QA by those projects become a factor worth investigating on how it influenced the implementation of IQA in the beneficiary Universities. In addition to degree of training, it is also worth considering whether degree of autonomy and oblige policy imposing on Universities regarding to QA motivate or hamper the Universities to implement the system of IQA. Accordingly, degree of training, degree autonomy and oblige policy on QA belonging to the category of contextual factors were under examination in this study.

In short, the conceptual framework in this study is briefly illustrated in

Figure 3.

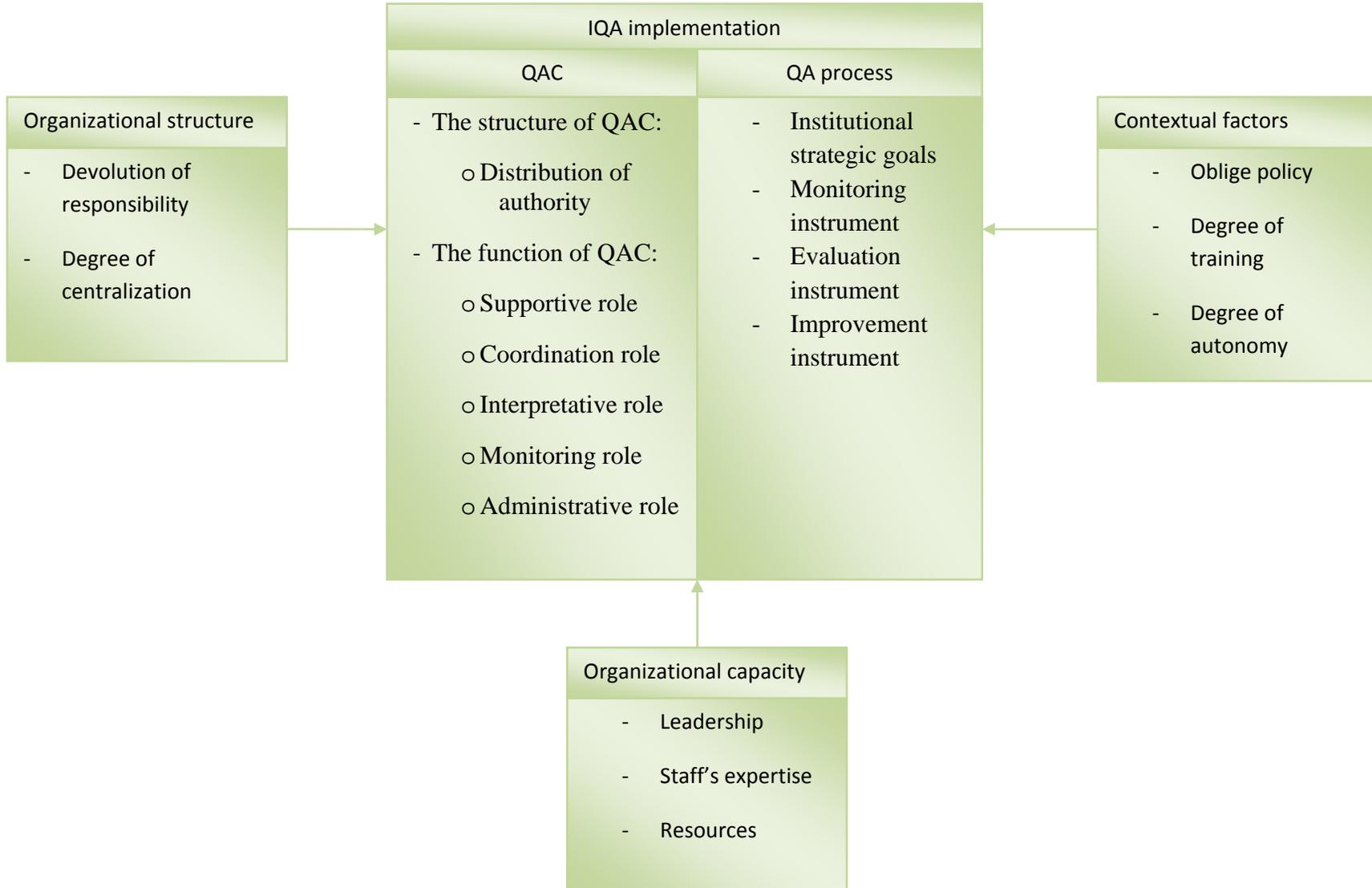


Figure 3: Description of the conceptual framework

2.5 Definition of variable:

- **Quality assurance center:** An organizational unit, located centrally, with the task to support activities and processes leading to quality improvement and accountability in the University. In this regard, the center for quality assurance performs 5 primary functions including supportive role, coordinating role, interpretative role, monitoring role and administrative role.
- **Internal quality assurance process:** Internal quality assurance process includes all the activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of the University. It adopts a tailor-made approach, equipped with 4 basic elements of institutional goals, monitoring instruments, evaluation instruments and activities that aim for quality improvement.
- **Organizational structure:** The structure of University, particularly the devolution of responsibility in QA activities and the degree of centralization, which can influence the implementation of IQA.
- **Organizational capacity:** The capacities of a University, regarding leadership, staff's expertise in QA and resources that can help the University implement an effective system of IQA.
- **Contextual factors:** the factors that are embedded in the context of Vietnam, particularly the oblige policy, degree of training and degree of autonomy can influence the IQA implementation in Vietnam's Universities.

Chapter 3

3. Research design and method

3.1 Research design

The implementation of internal quality assurance in Vietnam's Universities and its influential factors was studied using multiple case-study design.

Since 1998, Vietnam's higher education has been receiving much support from the Higher Education Project 1 & 2 (sponsored by World Bank) and Profqim (sponsored by Dutch Government) in terms of quality improvement and quality assurance. However, not every University in Vietnam received the support from these international projects. Therefore, for the purpose of this research on investigating the IQA implementation in Vietnam's higher education, the case study research was chosen as it can help to provide a true picture of IQA implementation in the context of Vietnam's higher education institutions.

The data for this qualitative case study were collected with the assistance of Rectors (or Vice Rectors), the Director (Vice Director) of Quality Assurance Centers and the Dean (or Vice Dean) of Faculty in 10 Universities in Vietnam. Data were collected using a questionnaire for open-ended interviews. Within case analysis and cross case analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data gather from respondents. Furthermore, self evaluation reports as documentation was also utilized to strengthen the findings and verify the validity of this study.

3.2 Approach of the study

The research questions developed on the topic of quality assurance in higher education in the context of Vietnam guided this study to qualitative research in the form of multiple case study design. As defined by Creswell (1998), case studies are an exploration of "a case or multiple cases over time through detail, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context". With this approach, this study relied on interview data from key stakeholders involved in approving and supervising the implementation of quality assurance process in the Universities. Beside, the qualitative element of this study also referred to the information data gathered from the self evaluation reports untaken by Universities when they would like to be accredited.

3.3 Case selection

In order to investigate the IQA implementation in Vietnam' Universities, this study used purposeful sampling, which was defined as "selecting information rich for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (Patton, 2002). There are various strategies to select purposeful sampling. In this study, the convenience sampling strategies was utilized. Convenience sampling strategy means "cases that are selected simply because they are available and easy to study" (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). It should be noted that even though convenience sampling strategy was a common approach, this approach has the lowest credibility. The sample in this study was convenient because it was based on the Universities' willing to participate. Ten Universities were purposefully selected to be part of the study. The selection of ten Universities was based on two dimensions: the status of the Universities (public or non-public University) and the degree of support receiving from international projects. Accordingly, the sample in this study included four public Universities receiving the supports and training from international projects, three public Universities and three private Universities who have not received any supports from international projects.

Table 1 Overview of features of the Universities

	University	Status	Year of establishment	Number of faculties/ Number of institutions	Number of study programs	Number of teaching staffs	Teachers with doctoral degree or higher /total number of teaching staffs ratio	Teachers with master's degree/total number of teaching staffs
Beneficiary	Vinh Uni	Public	1959	18 faculties	Not available	642	21.3%	51%
	Can Tho Uni	Public	1966	13 faculties	76	830	10.3%	46%
	Da Nang Uni	Public	1994	6 institutions ¹	67	1276	12.3%	43.7%
	Thai Nguyen Uni	Public	1994	9 institutions	151	2.400	13%	47%
Non- Beneficiary Universities	Hue University's College of Education	Public	1957	13 faculties	17	270	28%	53%
	Humanity and Social Sciences Uni	Public	1957	18 faculties	53	483	48%	66%
	Uni of Economics Ho Chi Minh City	Public	1976	12 faculties	23	479	29.6%	39.6%
	Duy Tan Uni	Non-public	1994	13 faculties	23	465	7.47%	69.7%
	Hoa Sen Uni	Non-public	1991	4 faculties	26	194	12.37%	61.86%
	Binh Duong Economics and Technology Uni	Non-public	1998	5 faculties	5	Not available	Not available	Not available

¹ Thai Nguyen Uni and Da Nang Uni are regional Universities under the remit of the regional governments and MoET. This type of University is multi-disciplinary University, which comprise of numbers of small institutions.

With regard to the units responsible for quality assurance in Universities, since 2008, Universities in Vietnam have been required to establish quality assurance centers (QACs). These centers are in charge of preparing for the self-evaluation processes, writing self evaluation reports as well as collecting relevant evidence, for example the regular conduct of surveys on students’ satisfaction, alumni and employers. In most cases, these centers are also responsible for testing activities in the Universities.

Table 2 QACs’ name and year of establishment

	Universities	Name of QACs	Year of establishment
Beneficiary	Vinh Uni	Quality Assurance Center	2007
	Can Tho Uni	Quality Assurance and Testing Center	2006
	Da Nang Uni	Quality Assurance Department	2010
	Thai Nguyen Uni	Department of Inspection, Testing and Educational Quality	2006
Non-Beneficiary Universities	Hue University’s College of Education	Office of Assessment and Quality Assurance in Higher Education	2010
	Humanity and Social Science Uni	Office of Testing and Quality Assurance	2007
	Uni of Economics Ho Chi Minh City	Office of Testing and Quality Assurance	2006
	Duy Tan Uni	Office of Quality Assurance and ISO	2007
	Hoa Sen Uni	Office of Quality Assurance and Inspection	2007
	Binh Duong Economics and Technology Uni	Office of Inspection, and Educational Quality Assurance	2009

3.4 Participant selection:

Beckers and Kogan (1980, cited by Paewai, 2011) described different level within the higher education system, in which groups tend to share value and functions: individual academics, academic units, the university and the central authority. It is believed that these levels have different influence on the changes of the University. For that reason, this study tried to involve the participant from different levels in a University in order to see different perspectives toward the issue of quality assurance as well as the process of its implementation. Accordingly, the participants of this study were: Rector (Vice rector) of the University, Dean (Vice Dean) or the Faculty and Director (Vice Director) of the QACs. These groups of people were considered as respondents because of their key roles in the process of approving, managing and supervising the development of quality assurance structures and the implementation of quality assurance process in their Universities. It was believed that these people with their great responsibilities for educational process in their Universities can provide rich information about the topic, thus increased the possibilities to collect reliable and relevant data for the study.

Regarding the role of Rectors toward the issue of internal quality assurance, due to their responsibilities for activities in the strategic apex, for strategic plan, missions and goals of the Universities, the Rectors are believed to have good insight about organizational structures and capacity in their Universities. Moreover, they are the persons who directly perform the decisions and policies imposed from MoET. Therefore, they can have better understanding about the internal as well as external factors that may support or hamper the implementation of IQA in their Universities. Accordingly, this study tried to involve 10 Rectors/Vice Rectors, one of each University. However, only 4 Rectors/Vice-Rectors from 4 Universities took response to researcher’s request. An overview of the characteristics of the Rectors/Vice-Rectors or President of the Universities was summarized as Table 3 below:

Table 3 Summary of the characteristics of University Rectors/ Vice Rector/President

University Rector/Vice Rector/ President	Gender	Experience as a Rector/Vice Rector/President	Qualification
Vinh University	Male	2 years	Associate Professor
Can Tho University	Male	5 years	Associate Professor
Da Nang University	Male	2 years	Associate Professor
Hoa Sen University	Female	16 years	Doctor

Further to the Deans of the Faculty, as working in the middle line according to organizational structure in Universities, Deans of Faculty are likely to address some critical successful factors in relation to quality management. Additionally, having responsibilities as regards local coordination and management of teaching and learning, the Deans seem to be the key persons in communicating and tracking different kinds of goals and in making information flow up and down. Therefore, interviewing the Deans can provide valuable information of how the responsibilities in relation to quality assurance are devolved through the University, or how decision-making on quality assurance is structured in the University. More importantly, Deans are expected to have good insight of the teaching-learning activities taking place in the primary process; therefore, it would be informative to interview Deans about the quality assurance process that covers teaching-learning activities in their faculties in order to investigate the actual QA activities in the Universities.

With regards to the Directors of QACs, due to their main responsibilities for QA activities in the Universities, their role towards this study is quite important. They are expected to provide detailed information about Universities’ approach for their quality-oriented activities. Additionally, the interviews with the Directors of QACs can also help investigate whether the University has the processes in place to ensure the quality. Furthermore, as far as the influence of international projects on IQA implementation in the Universities is concerned, it is believed that the Director of QACs, particularly the QACs in beneficiary Universities, would provide information on how the trainings by these international projects can benefit the Universities in terms of quality assurance structure and processes. For their important role, this study tried to involve 10 Directors/Vice Directors of QACs, one from each University. Only one person declined an interview, so the final sample of Directors of QACs comprised 9 persons. Table 4 below summarized the background of QACs’ Directors/Vice Directors.

Table 4 QAC Directors' gender, years of experience in QA work, and qualifications

	Universities	Gender	Years of experience in QA work	Qualifications
Beneficiary	Vinh Uni	Male	5 years	Master's degree
	Can Tho Uni	Male	6 years	Bachelor
	Thai Nguyen Uni	Male	6 years	Master's degree
Non-Beneficiary	Hue University's College of Education	Male	2 years	Doctor
	Humanity and Social Science Uni	Female	5 years	Doctor
	Uni of Economics Ho Chi Minh City	Male	6 years	Master's degree
	Duy Tan Uni	Male	5 years	Master's degree
	Hoa Sen Uni	Female	5 years	Master's degree
	Binh Duong Economics and Technology Uni	Male	2 years	Master's degree

In general, the total number of the interviews held 10 Universities was 19 interviews as shown in Table 5:

Table 5 Number of person interviewed per Universities

	University	QAC's Director/Manager/Assistant Manager	Dean	Rector/Vice Rector/ University President	Total
Beneficiary	Vinh Uni	1	1	1	3
	Can Tho Uni	1	1	1	3
	Da Nang Uni			1	1
	Thai Nguyen Uni	1			1
Non-Beneficiary	Hue University's College of Education	1			1
	Humanity and Social Science Uni	1	1		2
	Uni of Economics Ho Chi Minh City	1	1		2
	Duy Tan Uni	1	1		2
	Hoa Sen Uni	1	1	1	2
	Binh Duong Economics and Technology Uni	1	1		2
Total					19

3.5 Data collection

The data from this study utilized multiple sources to collect data. Multiple sources were defined by Yin (2003) as the usage of different research strategies to collect data, for example surveys, observations, interviews. In this study, the sources of document and interview were used to address the research questions.

3.5.1 Interview

The strategy for data collection in this study used the open-ended interview so that interviewees can provide their own thoughts, words and insides. The interview process was conducted face-to-face, which was assumed to provide a comprehensive explanation of each individual's understanding of the research questions.

The Rectors (Vice Rectors), Directors (Vice Directors) of Quality Assurance Centers and Deans (Vice Deans) of the Faculty were interviewed separately. The interview lasted for 45 minutes and was conducted in their Universities. All of the interviews were audio-recorded. Note was also taken during the interview.

Three interview protocols were developed for this study (Annex 3). The first is "Directors of Quality Assurance Center" version, the second is "Rectors/Vice rector" version and the third is "Deans of the Faculty". The first version mainly asks the directors of quality assurance center about the process of quality assurance system and the structure and functions of quality assurance center in their university. Besides, the factors of "staff's expertise", "degree of training" and "leadership" were also contained in the first version for directors of quality assurance centers. For the "Rectors/Vice rectors" version, the protocol consists of six sections, mainly asking about the factors that have influence on the implementation of internal quality assurance system. Third version also mainly asked the Dean of Faculties their opinion on the influential factors that really matter to the process of quality system in institution. It includes the questions about "devolution of responsibility", "degree of centralization", "leadership" and "staff development".

3.5.2 Documentation:

The document needed in this study was the Universities' self-evaluation reports to support the interview data. The rationale for this document selection is that the reports also provide information of Universities' strengths and weaknesses in their activities for ensuring the educational quality; therefore, these reports can help investigate how the internal quality assurance has been actually implemented in Vietnamese universities.

The self-evaluation reports conducted by Vietnamese universities are based on the MoET's accreditation standard, including:

1. Mission and objectives of the university
2. Organization and management.
3. Training program
4. Training activities
5. Managerial staff, lecturers and staff
6. Learners
7. Scientific research and technology development
8. International cooperation
9. Library, learning equipment and other facilities
10. Finance and financial management

The review in this part only focuses on the quality assurance processes for the teaching and learning activities in the Universities, which are shown in the Universities' description of their strengths and weaknesses on the standard 3 of MoET's accreditation standards. There are 6 institutional self evaluation reports from 6 universities reviewed in this part.

Table 6 Self evaluation report collected from the University

	University	Self evaluation reports
Beneficiary	Vinh Uni	X
	Can Tho Uni	X
	Da Nang Uni	
	Thai Nguyen Uni	X
Non- Beneficiary Universities	Hue University's College of Education	
	Humanity and Social Science Uni	X
	Uni of Economics Ho Chi Minh City	X
	Duy Tan Uni	
	Hoa Sen Uni	X
	Binh Duong Economics and Technology Uni	

3.6 Data analysis:

This study utilized a multiple case study design, which is one of the approaches of qualitative research. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in its use of non-statistical methods of analysis and reporting (Hans, 2009). According to Hans (2009), as illustrated as a jigsaw puzzle, analyzing qualitative data like the process of fitting and refitting the pieces to “a variety of tentative models until few unconnected pieces remain and the fit seems subjectively and logically satisfying”

Dey (1993) considered a process to analyze qualitative data as a circular process of describing phenomena, classifying it, and seeing how our concepts interconnect. In this process, according to him, the first step in qualitative analysis is to develop comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon under study, which should include information about the context of an act, the intentions and meanings that organize action, and its subsequent evolution. The second step is classification. As stated by him, classification is a conceptual process. When classifying, two things must be done: breaking the data up into bits and assigning these bits to categories or classes which bring these bits together again, if in a novel way. Thus all the bits that ‘belong’ to a particular category are brought together; and in the process, the discrimination will still be done between the criteria for allocating data to one category or another. And finally, connections should be made in order to close the circle. According to Dey (1993), concepts are the building blocks of analysis; and in qualitative analysis, the first task is to create these building blocks. But building requires more than blocks, and the blocks must be brought together. Accordingly, connecting concepts is the analytic equivalent of putting mortar between the building blocks.

Likewise, Seidel (1998) also developed a useful model to explain the basic process of qualitative data analysis. The model consists of 3 parts: Noticing, Collecting, and Thinking about interesting things. These parts are interlinked and cyclical.

- Noticing: there are 2 levels of noticing. On a general level, noticing means making observations, writing field notes, tape recording interviews, and gathering documents, etc. When we do this, we are producing a record of the things that we have noticed. Once we have produced a record, we will focus our attention on that record, and notice interesting things in the record. We do this by reading the record. In fact, we will read the record many times. As we notice things in the record we name, or "code," them.
- Collecting and sorting instances of things: This process is analogous to working on a jigsaw puzzle where we start by sorting the pieces of the puzzle, including breaking up, separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units. Then with facts broken down into manageable pieces, we will sort and sift them with the aim to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion.
- Thinking about things: In the thinking process we examine the things that we have collected in order to make some type of sense out of each collection, look for patterns and relationships both within a collection, and also across collections, and make general discoveries about the phenomena you are researching.

In conclusion, qualitative analysis is a process of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal its characteristic elements and structure (Dey, 2010). It is also understood as the process in which we move from the qualitative data that have been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situation we are investigating (Taylor et al). Therefore, the aim of quality data analysis is more than just describing the data. It aims at interpreting, explaining, understanding, and perhaps even predicting the event or situation to answer the question of know-how, and why, as well as what.

Additionally, even though the process of analyzing qualitative data can be name differently by different social scientist, the core of qualitative data analysis actually lies in the related processes of summarizing transcribed data, coding the data into themes and generalizing from the themes.

Accordingly, the interview data in this study will be analyzed into 3 steps:

- Summarizing transcribed interviews within case analysis: Participant responses to each question were summarized and quotations were selected in order to illuminate the main points and get the context of the response. Table 6 presented how question summaries were arranged according to each respondent.

Table 7 Summary of interview data by respondents in each case

	Questions	QAC' Director	Rectors of the Universities	Deans of the Faculties
1	QA center	Summary of Director's response to Q1-5		
2	Monitoring system			
3	Evaluation instrument			
4	Quality improvement			
5	Staff's expertise			
6	Degree of training			
7	Devolution of responsibility		Summary of Rector 's response to Q7-12	Summary of Dean's response to Q7-9
8	Degree of centralization			
9	Leadership			
10	Funding			
11	Oblige policy			
12	Degree of autonomy			
13	Curriculum			Summary of Dean's response to Q13-14
14	Staff development			

- Coding the data into themes through cross case analysis: After the summary, data collected each case was analyzed and coded into common patterns, themes, generations and categories.
- Generalizing from the themes: The coding summary will be used to generalize the phenomena in the question by integrating the question responses as outlined:
 - o Responses from Q1 (QA center), Q2 (Monitoring instruments), Q3 (Evaluation instruments), Q4(Quality improvement), Q13 (Curriculum) and Q14 (Staff development) will be combined to investigate how IQA has been implemented among universities in Vietnam
 - o Responses from Q 5(Staff's expertise), Q6 (Degree of training), Q7 (Devolution of responsibility), Q8 (Degree of centralization), Q9 (Leadership), Q10 (Funding), Q11 (Oblige policy) and Q12 (Degree of autonomy) will be combined to investigate the influential factors of IQA implementation among universities in Vietnam.

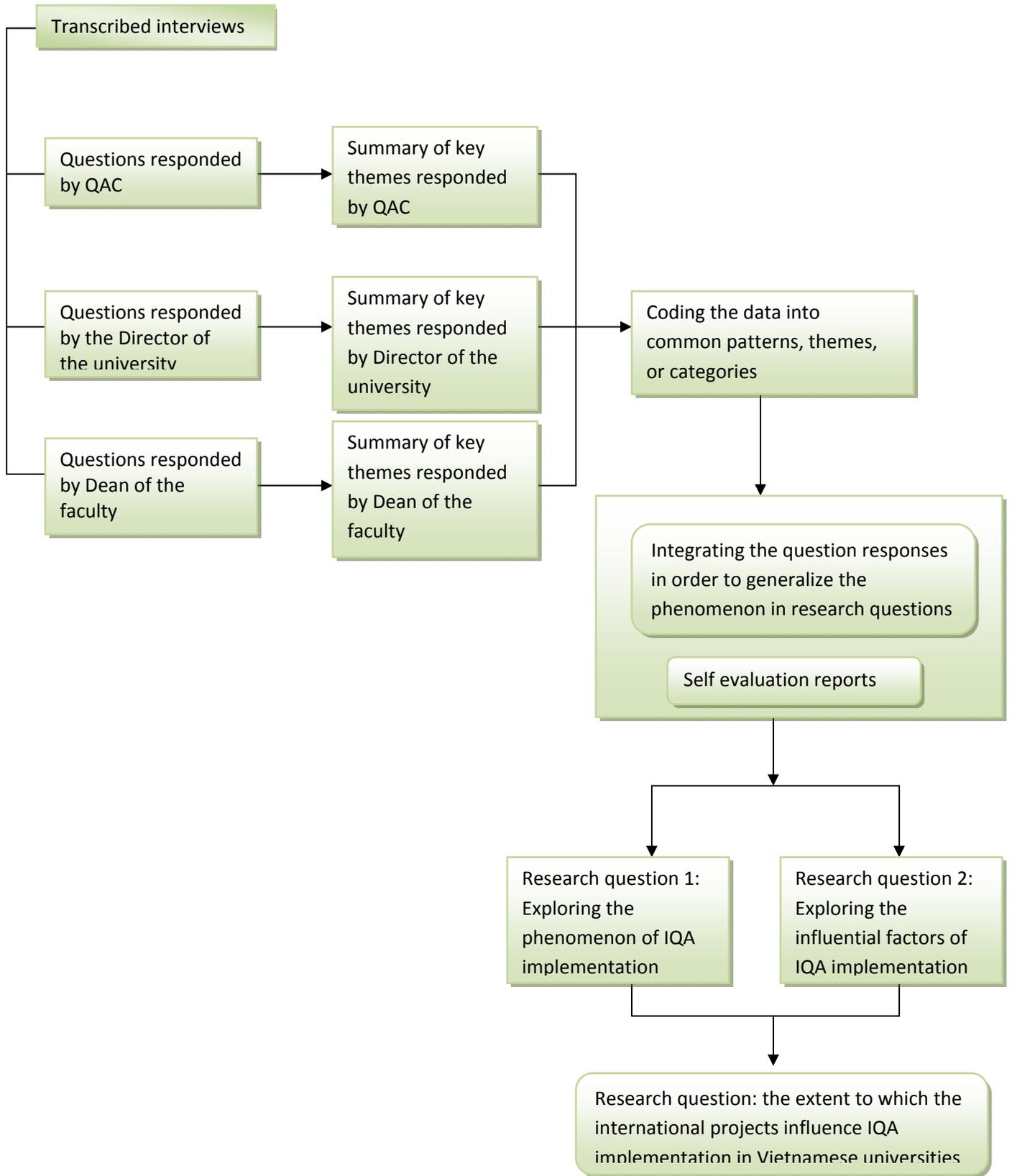


Figure 4: Summary of how interview data will be analyzed

3.7 Issue of validity:

One of limitations of qualitative research is related to the possibility to generalize the findings from one context to another context (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore, various validation strategies must be utilized in order to make the studies credible and rigorous (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

The validity for this study was achieved using the validation strategies of triangulation. According to Patton (1990), one of the approaches for triangulation in the field of qualitative research is through the utilization of various data sources. This means comparing the perspectives of people from different views; and in this study the different views were the perspectives of QACs' Directors as compared to the perspectives of the Rectors or the Deans. Accordingly, about 2 to 3 interviews in each of 10 Universities scattering from the North to the South of Vietnam would provide the possible degree of triangulation. Additionally, data sources in this study also included the transcribed interviews with key stakeholders of the Universities and the self evaluation reports describing in details all the Universities' strengths and weakness, thus increasing the opportunities to fulfill the method of triangulation. Furthermore, the data in this study were analyzed and compared with existing literature on the issue of quality assurance in higher education from European, African and Asian countries, which can also form an integral component to assure the validity of this study.

Chapter 4:

4. Analysis and results

The case study examined how IQA processes are implemented and identified the influential factors to the IQA implementation in the Universities in Vietnam. In this section, the data collected from the interviews with the Director (or Manager/ Assistant Manager) of the Quality Assurance Center, Dean (or Vice-Dean) of the Faculty and Rector (or Vice-Rector) of the University will be presented in two parts: within case analysis and cross case analysis.

4.1 Within case analysis:

In this part, within case analysis is presented to investigate the Universities independently. Participant responses to each interview question are summarized, and quotation is selected to illuminate the main points and get the context of the response. Participant responses are categorized into 3 main themes: Quality Assurance Center, QA processes in the University, and the Influential factors on IQA implementation. Each variable will be also described separately in each theme.

This part also presents the data in document analysis which is exploited from the institutional self evaluation reports to further investigate the QA process in individual University.

4.1.1 Case 1: Vinh University (VU)

- Short description of the University:

Vinh University founded in 1959, is a major, public, comprehensive, and research university in the North of Central Vietnam. Its main goals are to train multidisciplinary and multilevel teachers and researchers and to do scientific and technological research related to training and application of science. Currently the University has 36.000 students from 50 provinces and cities in Vietnam, and more than 1000 staff. It consists of 17 faculties, 8 centers, 9 departments and 1 high school for gifted students. In addition, VU assists other regional universities, colleges, vocational schools and other institutions in their teaching-learning activities and personnel improvement.

VU is one of the 5 universities participating in Profqim, HEP1 & HEP2 international projects. As a beneficiary of these projects, VU was assisted in the establishment and functioning of QA center. In 2005, VU accomplished its first self- evaluation report and was evaluated by an external team in 2006. VU is planning to accomplish the second round of accreditation in 2013.

- Quality assurance center:

According to the Director of QAC at VU, the QAC was established in 2007 as a management support unit at University level, with 2 satellite QA officers at faculty level and 1 satellite QA officer at unit level. When asked about the functions of QAC, the director of VU's QAC mentioned 3 main functions of QAC:

- Consulting the Board about quality assurance activities
- Steering and implementing QA activities at VU
- Testing

However, as stated by the Director, currently the role of VU's QAC is to support the self evaluation process of the University as a whole, as proclaimed by the MoET. Besides, it was also admitted by the Director that the Center actually focuses more on the responsible for testing. As further explained by the Director, he stated that because "the University doesn't have enough money for some QA activities" it is difficult for the Center to develop the activities for quality assurance in the University, for example program evaluation or developing and evaluating the curricula based on learning outcomes. Additionally, according to the Director, the responsibility for testing can actually help the Center in terms of financial

issue (they can earn some money from testing activities). As a consequence, the role for testing seems to be more important than the role for QA. Therefore, except for the evaluation instruments developed during Profqim projects, so far the Center has not developed any other new documents which are considered as necessary for QAC to increase the staff's awareness toward quality issue, for example the quality manual or quality protocol.

In short, according to the Director, regarding QA activities, the QAC can only fulfill the function as a facilitating unit for self evaluation process in VU.

- **Quality assurance process:**

As stated by the Rector of the University, VU has developed a clear statement of University's mission, vision as well as strategic goals. Further to the quality assurance approach that VU is adopting, the Director of QAC revealed that VU does not apply any specific quality management approach for the implementation of IQA. According to the QAC's Director, the management schemes in VU are mainly based on "the traditional way of management"; therefore the monitoring activities are disjointed and not systematized. As described by the Director, the structured monitoring system in VU to collect information about the quality of its activities includes students' entrance exam score (as input), students' related information, and students' graduation score (as output). The Director further stated that, this monitoring system in VU, managed by the Department of Academic Affairs, just stores students' information, and they even do not use the information for the effective management of training programs and other activities. In fact, there is no information of alumni after students finishing their study, there is also no information from employers to see whether or not the new graduate can meet the labor market requirement, then accordingly there are no plans for the improvement on the training process or curriculum.

When asked about the periodic review process of annual plans and long-term plans conducted at university level, these following activities were depicted, as illustrated in

Figure 5: Every academic year the university will concretize its educational objective in an annual plan, which is disseminated to staff member through conferences. Then, at the end of academic year, there will be a year-end conference at University level, Faculty level and Unit level to evaluate the extent to which the activities set in plans are accomplished. Finally, educational objectives will be supplemented and adjusted accordingly.

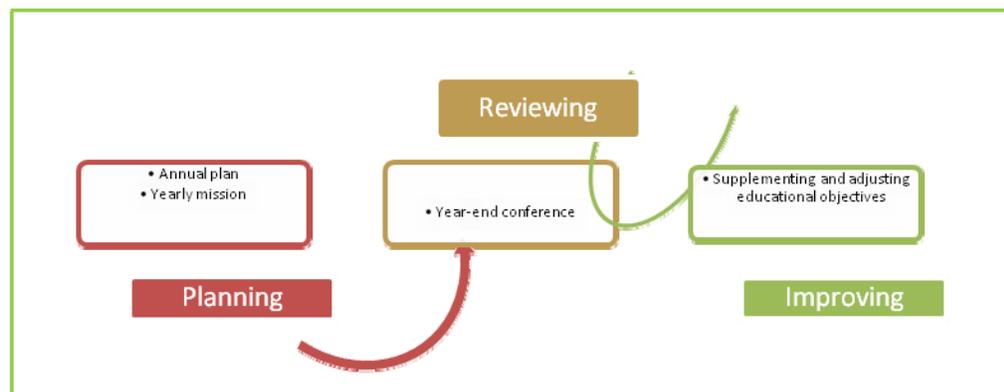


Figure 5: Periodic review cycle at VU

However, the Director emphasized the fact that the process of reviewing, implementing and adjusting educational mission is not well described in written documents, leading to the situation that there are

actually no differences before and after the educational objectives are adjusted. Moreover, it was also criticized by the Director that there are seldom plans evaluated as unaccomplished.

Further to program evaluation, as stated by the QAC's Director, there used to be faculty evaluation at VU. As he said, QAC had developed 7 standards and 34 criteria for the quality assurance in faculties. Based on these standards and criteria, the faculty itself had executed a self evaluation and a final report was made with provided forms. 11 faculties had already done a self evaluation. After the self evaluation, each faculty was audited by an audit team consisting of QAC staff members, VU and external experts. However, according to the Director, this activity already ended 3 years ago due to the financial constrains.

In terms of evaluation instruments used in the University, the Director indicated the set of Accreditation standards. According to him, QAC uses MoET's accreditation standards to conduct self evaluation, and he emphasized the priority to accomplish the institutional self-evaluation report. In terms of the feedback collection activities, at present, the University is carrying out the surveys on students. Faculty will be informed with these feedbacks of students; however, the results of feedback are not followed up at faculty level. Teachers at VU are also confidentially informed with the results of students' feedback.

The process of assuring quality was also further investigated at faculty level in VU with the interview with one of the Deans in VU. It is believed that internal quality assurance should not be understood merely as a specific quality monitoring (such as process descriptions, data collection and analysis) or evaluation process often conducted by QAC, but it should include all activities related to defining, assuring and enhance the quality of the University. In the context of VU, it seems that the Dean has a strong commitment to quality and has established a sound process for managing educational program based on institutional framework. As described by him, the training plans are designed and disseminated at the end of previous academic year. Based on that, each sub-unit in the faculty will distribute the training plans and teaching-learning schedules to each teacher in each semester. In terms of curriculum design, the Dean told that they designed the curriculum based on learning outcomes; however, the faculty didn't have clear procedures for the evaluation of curriculum and program contents. In fact, there is no program evaluation in VU. In terms of student assessment procedures, the Dean especially focused on student assessment procedures because according to him, testing the knowledge, skills and competencies of students is one of the ways to assure quality. In his opinion, the student assessment procedures can partly help to define the issue of quality in the process of teaching and learning in the faculty. Therefore, the strict assessment regulation was laid down in his faculty to prevent cheating and assure the fairness in testing students; however, he seems not to care about the assessment methods or intended learning outcome set in the program in the process of preparing test for students. The intended learning outcomes are actually not publically available to students.

A closer look on VU's institutional self evaluation report was taken to further investigate the quality assurance process at the primary process- learning and teaching process in Vu. As mentioned in the report, all the training programs in VU have definite educational objectives, which are relevant to University's missions. The training programs are designed systematically based on MoET's framework, and they can satisfy the needs of learners and labor market demand. However, VU admitted in its self evaluation report that there are definite weaknesses existing during the development of their training programs, which are: The University hasn't involved the participation of employers in the process of designing the training programs; and it also hasn't collected feedback from new graduate as an input for the program improvement.

In terms of staff development, the faculty has very good policies in staff development and really creates opportunities for their academic staff to improve their expertise and their teaching capacity. For example, the faculty provides academic development courses, including post-graduate certificate and master's degree. The faculty also offers training workshops for teachers on teaching methods.

- **The influential factors on IQA implementation:**

As described by the Rector of VU, quality is an important issue for the directory board of VU, and the Rector showed a strong commitment to quality. According to him, he was very active in learning and collecting good practices in quality assurance from other Universities with longer experience in QA. He described his role as initial steer in the process of quality assurance in VU; and stressed that the responsibility for QA at VU was devolved to lower level, which is faculty level. In his opinion, Deans are the ones who mainly have responsibility for the quality issue at faculty level; and therefore, the Rector will steer the management of QA activities from the top and just involve in the case of serious problems. Additionally, the Director of VU's QAC also specially emphasized the role of the University's Rector, in other words, the role of senior leadership when he was asked about the influential factors to the implementation of IQA. According to him, if the Rector doesn't care and is not enthusiastic about the issue of quality assurance; QA activities will be seriously abandoned in the University.

The quality structure at VU is organized in a decentralized way: in the management board, there is a vice-rector specifically assigned to be in charge of QA; at faculty level, Deans will be mainly in charge of the quality issue in general and 2 other academic staffs responsible for some quality assurance activities; besides, at unit level, there is 1 staff co-operating with QAC in the field of quality assurance. With this way of organizing, it seems that the responsibilities for quality assurance in VU are well devolved to the possible lower level. However, these staff members at lower level actually just do the job of collecting evidence (as they think as quality assurance activities) for the self-evaluation report conducted every 5 years for accreditation, according to the Director of QAC.

When discussed the issue of expertise in quality assurance, even though the Director of QAC was aware of its importance toward the effectiveness of quality-oriented activities in the University and even though most QAC staff members are inexperienced in QA; the Center doesn't have any policies to recruit the persons who have expertise in educational quality assurance or equivalent. The Director of QAC once again emphasized the main function of QAC for testing for the University, and therefore more than half of his staff members are taking responsibility for testing.

Despite of the fact that VU didn't take advantage of the capacity building in QA by Profqim project for the development of QAC and the promotion of QA activities in VU; VU really appreciated the support from international projects. According to them, the international project, especially Profqim project, had much influence on quality-oriented activities in VU. The Director of QAC particularly stated that Profqim project was very effective in helping VU establish the QAC. "If there hadn't been this project (Profqim project), there wouldn't have been QAC in VU as well as the QA network among universities in Vietnam" as mentioned by the Director of VU's QAC. He further said that there was a misunderstood between "quality accreditation and quality assurance" in VU, accordingly the QAC used to have the name as "Quality Accreditation and Educational Inspection Center" and educational inspection is its main function; however thanks to Profqim, the status and position of QAC in the university is now clear. In addition, the international projects also play an important role in building the capacity of QAC as a supporting unit for the self evaluation process in the University.

The QAC's Director pointed out the importance of financial issue in hampering the QA activities to be developed and implemented in VU. He argued that "program evaluation cost lots of money, at least 25 million VND for a program, which is a big amount to Vinh University". He also emphasized the difficulty of VU in paying salary to academic staffs who volunteer to take responsible for quality assurance activities. Therefore, he concluded that financial issue is one of the biggest constrains which have influence on the implementation of IQA in Vinh University. This concern of financial issue toward QA activities was confirmed by the Rector. According to the Rector, in order to assure the educational quality, the learning resources should be assured. As described by the Rector, the low budget from the Government for VU has resulted in the limited financial resources for the University in general; and consequently there is a lack of learning facilities for students, for example library has insufficient supply of reference books, textbooks are not up-to-date, and computers have limited internet access.

In terms of the influence of oblige policy of QAC establishment, since VU is a public University with Government subsidies, they didn't find any difficulties in implementing the Government's oblige policy of establishing the QAC. The only condition that both Rector and QAC's Director concern in order to implement well this oblige policy is the financial issue. According to the QAC's Director, it would be better if "the Government should have a clear budget for the development of QAC in the University to concretize and create a legal basis for the use of financial resources for QA works"

With regard to the degree of autonomy, VU totally agrees with the current degree of institutional autonomy given by the Government. According to the Rector, all the policies regarding to the issue of autonomy, for example national curriculum framework or entrance exam, are reasonable and are in line with the social development oriented by the Government.

4.1.2 Case 2: Can Tho University (CTU)

- Short description of CTU:

Founded in 1966, CTU has been an important higher education institution in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. It has an enrolment of 35,038 undergraduate students, 1,806 students following Master courses, and 40 Ph.D candidates. The number of staff members is 1,908, including 927 teaching staffs and 981 supporting staffs. Currently, it has 77 undergraduates, 28 Master and 8 Doctoral training programs.

CTU's main missions are training, conducting scientific research, and developing technology to serve the regional and national socio-economic development. In addition to the training responsibilities, CTU has been taking part in scientific research projects for applying the advances in scientific and technological knowledge to solve the problems related to science, technology, economics, culture and society in the region.

From 1994 to 2003, with the supports of Dutch Government and experts in MHO project, the issue of quality in CTU started to be concerned in a systematic way. With MHO frame program, CTU has implemented some quality-oriented activities, for example innovating curricula and educational programs, rewriting textbooks, and improving teaching methods.

Regarding to the development of quality assurance activities at CTU, it has been taking part in Profqim, HEP 1 and HEP 2 international projects successively since 2003. In 2005, CTU conducted its self-evaluation report and was accredited in 2006.

- Quality assurance center (QAC):

The interview was conducted with the Vice Director of CTU's QAC. According to the Vice Director, the QAC was established in May 2005 under the name of "Quality Assurance and Educational Testing Center" as a unit within CTU, responsible for supporting and consulting other units to establish and develop their own quality assurance systems to assure and enhance the educational quality as well as the management activities. Under the direct management of a Vice Rector, the QAC is also working with a network of QA satellite, including 15 QA teams across the University. Those satellites will carry out QA plans and activities at unit level in accordance with the QA plans set by QAC and the peer review teams.

As stated by the Vice Director, at CTU the tasks for QA activities and testing activities are clearly distinguished. In terms of QA, currently QAC is responsible for:

- Consulting the Board to implement MoET's policies on the issue of internal quality assurance
- Establishing the international quality assurance system at CTU
- Conducting institutional self-evaluation every 5 years
- Conducting program evaluation based on AUN's standards at faculty level
- Establishing feedback system on stakeholders: survey on students, survey on alumni, survey on employers; and especially the teaching diary to monitor teachers' teaching hours in class

- Supporting the neighbor universities in region in terms of QA activities

In addition to those tasks, according to the Vice Director, developing the IQA systems, which is one of the core activities of QAC, can be understood as the establishment of PDCA-cycles on all levels of the University with all educational activities; therefore, the QAC also established an evaluation framework and discussed with other units in CTU on how to carry out these quality-oriented activities according to this framework.

The Vice Director is also well aware of the importance of strategic plans towards the development of the Center. He stated that “the strategies on quality assurance and quality accreditation will help the University and stakeholders define a clear target”. Accordingly, QAC has developed a strategic QA plans for 2009-2020 which emphasized on the accreditation by MoET, establishing QA procedures and applying QA international models (ABET, AUN), and training staff member in QA, includes 2 steps:

- From 2008-2015: Meet the national and Asian quality standards.
- From 2015-2020: Become one of the leading Universities in the region

Furthermore, the QAC at Can Tho University is very active in trying to increase the staff members’ awareness of the issue of quality as well as create quality culture in the University by issuing the “Quality Assurance Handbook” to each unit and faculty in the University, or regularly organizing seminar or workshop to train staff members about QA activities.

In summary, as describe by the Vice Director, with the establishment of QAC and 15 QA teams in 15 units, it is proved that the responsibilities for QA were well devolved to lower level within CTU, which may support the involvement of colleges, faculties or departments in the processes related to quality assurance and accreditation. The protocols/ QA strategic plans and QA reports are also well communicated to the possible lower levels in CTU, showing the assumption that the QAC not only focuses on the accomplishment of self-report for accreditation but also fulfill its functions of providing QA services to other units within the University.

- **QA process in CTU:**

As stated by the Vice Rector of CTU, the University has a long-term mission and values the importance to quality. The mission and educational objectives or strategic plans of the University are reviewed periodically: five-yearly cycle for strategic plans, one-yearly cycle for implementation plans, and weekly-group -review for the cycles of educational processes.

In terms of quality management model, CTU is adopting an all-encompassing approach to develop its internal quality assurance process, as shown in **Figure 6**. This approach, which is conducted at two levels: institutional level and program level, comprises these following elements: Quality Assurance System-EFQM (European Foundation Quality Management), MoET’s accreditation standards, the Internal Quality Assurance System- AUN model, and the AUN’s standards. According to the Vice Director of QAC, this is a tailor-made approach which derives from the institutional strategic goal, support the development of internal quality assurance system while fulfill the external requirement in the process. Additionally, with this approach, the IQA activities at CTU are expected to be operated in a systematic way, bringing good impact on the educational management activities in the University.

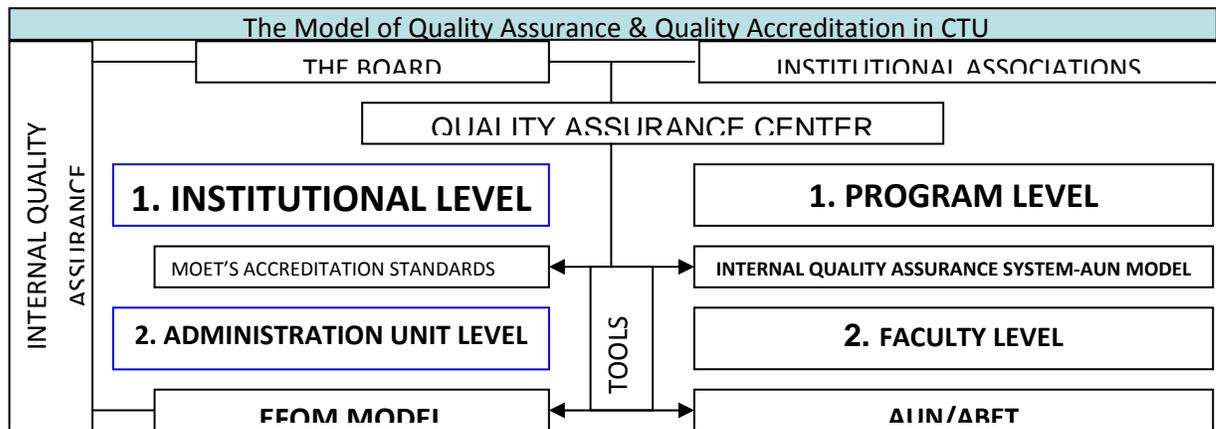


Figure 6: The Model of Quality Assurance & Quality Accreditation in CTU

Regarding to the monitoring system, the QAC's Director mentioned that the CTU's Information and Network Management Center is establishing a database including all information of students, teachers and the Board. However, according to him, this system is under construction and hasn't been implemented in the University.

Beside the institutional self-evaluation report conducted every 5 years, program evaluation is one of the QA activities that are conducted regularly at CTU. Until 2011, CTU has conducted the self-evaluation and peer review activities for 79 programs according to AUN's standards. While these 79 programs accomplished the internal evaluation; there will be other 2 programs officially accredited by AUN in 2013. The implementation procedures for program evaluation were communicated clearly in the annual quality assurance plans, including: QAC conducts the training; the University establishes self-evaluation team, secretary team, consultant teams and peer review teams; then the self-evaluation teams collect data & evidence to write self-evaluation reports; peer review teams will review the reports, which will be sent to the related units afterwards; finally the secretary team will collect all the peer review reports, analyze the information and write a summary report, in which the strength and weaknesses of each program will be raised.

Evaluation instruments are also well-developed in CTU, including: survey on satisfaction of students, teachers and staff; survey on alumni, survey on leaders and survey on employers...According to the Vice Director, all of data from these surveys are analyzed and publically available in written document and on the QAC's website. There are also plans for improvement, in which recommendations to the Board or Dean of the Faculty are given based on the analysis of data.

An interview was also conducted with one of the Deans in CTU. As described by the Dean of this faculty, CTU has a clear devolution of authority and responsibility for the issue of quality. According to this Dean, the clear devolution of authority and responsibility supports CTU's staff members to take greater initiative in doing their works, making the administration works more effective in training activities as well as in researching activities.

Regarding to QA activities, the Dean mentioned that his faculty has developed its own strategic quality plans based on the institutional framework. Being aware of the importance of QA, he planned to establish a QA team, which will be responsible for steering the activities related to QA in the whole faculty. The

faculty also has developed an online feedback system, in which students can do a survey online after their courses.

Until now his faculty has already conducted internal evaluation for 4 programs. This is a regular activity in his faculty. Besides that, currently the faculty is also preparing for another program (Agriculture Economics) to be accredited by AUN in 2013. As stated by this Dean, the activities of internal evaluation can really help his staff members know more about the activities of quality management, program design, the essential of meeting labor market demand, or the ways to collect and store data and information systematically. However, according to the Dean, his faculty actually faces many difficulties in conducting the internal evaluation; for example, due to the differences in expertise, the peer review team (which are often belong to another faculty) will have difficulty in evaluating the program in terms of curriculum design or testing design.

Regarding to the curriculum design, according to this Dean, his faculty is implementing a credit-based system and therefore the curriculum need to be designed based on learning outcomes. However, he admitted that the curriculum was mainly designed by the curriculum committee, and not based on stakeholders' opinion (feedback from employers or students). Additionally, there is no clear procedure for monitoring the curriculum even though he is well aware of its importance in assuring educational quality in his faculty. Moreover, the results of internal self evaluation are not followed up after the self evaluation reports are accomplished.

Regarding staff development, according to this Dean, teachers and staff members are financially supported to participate in professional activities to improve their expertise; especially teachers are always encouraged to earn their Ph.D degree in Vietnam and abroad.

Teaching and learning activities at CTU was further investigated through the standards 3 in its institutional self evaluation report. As written in the report, the University has detailed curricula and references for the majors offered by the University, which was developed by and academic committee according to the credit-based system. Besides, teachers and management staffs members are also involve in the development of curriculum, in which they contribute to needs analysis, objective definition, curriculum design, curriculum implementation and curriculum evaluation. It was additionally mentioned in the report that CTU periodically collects feedback on the curriculum from employers, alumni, educational institutions and other organizations to amend and supplement the curriculum. However, those feedbacks from employers and new graduate, which are collected in the annual meetings between CTU and employers and new graduates, are not well documented.

- The influential factors on IQA implementation:

In this part, an interview was mainly conducted at senior leadership level- the Vice Rector. Through this interview, it can be seen that the Vice Rector has a strong commitment to the issue of quality in CTU. More importantly, he participated in many seminars, workshops and training related to QA in abroad.

As described by him, the quality structure at CTU is organized in a decentralized way and the responsibilities for QA activities are well devolved to the lower levels in the University. He described his role as initial steering, administrating all QA activities in the University, and developing QA procedure. He emphasized the importance of establishing QA procedures, which will create the legal lobby so that every staff member in the University has to act according to the regulation and will gradually be aware of QA activities.

When the issue of the expertise in QA was discussed, the Vice Director of QAC stated that “expertise in QA is very important toward the ones who’s working for QAC; however, not many people has specialization on QA in Vietnam”. For that reason, when recruiting new staff for the Center, he had tendency to recruit the ones who have competence in English and computer. Additionally, it also can be seen from this interview that the Vice Director of QAC in CTU has a perspective that staffs have to learn

by themselves by reading and researching materials on QA. Furthermore, the Center also doesn't have long-term plan for the professional development in QA, except for sending his staffs to some small workshops or short training courses hold by MoET or by some international projects like HEP 2.

The Vice Director highly appreciated the supports from international projects regarding QA activities. According to him, thanks to these supports, the facilities, management system and staff capacity at CTU can be improved dramatically, which directly serves the activities of QA. Particularly, Profqim project had much influence on the establishment of IQA system at CTU. The Vice Director stated that with the help of the experts from Profqim, QAC at CTU can develop more QA services (for example conducting more surveys to assess the quality of the university's products, conducting program evaluation and contributing to increase the quality culture at CTU) to support CTU in the process of sustaining and improving its quality. Additionally, the CTU's QAC now becomes a leading Center in QA among other universities in Mekong Delta region; and therefore, it is also responsible for steering and supporting other universities to conduct QA activities in the region.

Leadership was considered as one of the most influential factors to the IQA implementation in the University by Vice Rector, Dean of the aforementioned faculty and QAC's Vice Director. According to the Vice Rector, leadership plays a vital role in deciding the success or failure of IQA implementation. He emphasized that "in order to implement well IQA, the leader himself has to consider QA as a major tool to help the University sustain and improve its quality; not for the purpose of accreditation only".

In terms of the issue of finance, the Vice Rector didn't think it as an influential factor to the process of implementing IQA. He stated that "quality can be improved even in the condition of lacking funding because QA is a continuous process and whether QA is implemented effectively or not depends on the establishment of procedures relating to QA activities". Additionally, the Vice Rector also didn't see the current degree of autonomy given by MoET to CTU as a hampering factor on the process of implementing IQA. According to him, he totally agreed with MoET's policies on the issue of autonomy.

The most influential factor to IQA implementation, as argued by the CTU's Vice Rector, is the external forces from the Government on this issue. According to him, accreditation is a useful tool to force Universities to pay more attention on their quality; and thereby concerning more on establishing IQA system. Therefore, the result of accreditation should be publicly available and should have a legal value in society. In addition, in his opinion the Vice Rector also argued that Vietnam's higher education urgently needs to have an independent accreditation organization to accredit Universities more objectively.

4.1.3 Case 3: Duy Tan University

- Short description of Duy Tan University (DTU):

Established in 1994, Day Tan University is the first private university in Central Vietnam. It offers seventeen courses to 43,000 students at undergraduates, college and postgraduate level. Currently, it has 15 faculties with 26 majors.

DTU's goal is to become a multidisciplinary and diversified university by the year 2020. DTU lecturers and staff are highly encouraged by the Board of Rectors to do scientific research, which in the perspective of DTU's Board, is considered as a basis for quality assurance in educating and adapting to social requirements.

In terms of QA, DTU accomplished the self evaluation report in 2007 and was evaluated by an external team in 2009. DTU didn't participate in any international projects related to QA.

- Quality assurance center (QAC):

An interview was conducted with the Vice Director of DTU's QAC. According to the Vice Director, the QAC at DTU was established in 2007 under the name of "Quality Assurance & ISO". As stated by him,

the main function of the Center is to consult the Board about the activities of QA. However, through the interview, it was revealed that DTU understood QA activities as the accreditation activity proclaimed by MoET. Therefore, the main task of the QAC is to support the self evaluation process of the University as whole. For example, in accreditation time, before accomplishing the institutional self evaluation, the Center will assign other units in the University to take responsibility for providing information or collecting evidence for 1 or 2 criteria in the MoET's accreditation standards. Also, the Center is in charge of organizing training courses to train staffs members on how to collect evidence for the self evaluation report.

As DTU is applying ISO system for its management system, besides the aforementioned accreditation activities, the Center is also in charge of some other activities, which are called ISO activities at DTU, including: requiring each unit in the University to develop their own "Quality Handbook" (describing the unit's function, responsibility and task assignment); or requiring each unit in DTU to develop their own "Procedure Handbook" (the main procedures for their activities).

When asked about quality assurance plan, the Vice Director stated that the Center hasn't developed its own strategic plan. It also doesn't do the task of supporting the University management in constructing a quality assurance plan at university level. This can lead to the assumption that the Center failed to include QA in strategic planning and the implementation of the University. Furthermore, the Center doesn't establish a network of QA officers from other units to foster QA activities across the University.

- **QA process:**

In terms of plans, DTU developed a QA strategic plan with 3 main objectives: strive to meet MoET's standards; strive to meet AUN's standards and ACICS's standards; and 2011-2012 academic year will be "Quality year". However, there is not clear what procedures and measures to be used to achieve those objectives in this plan.

As mentioned above, DTU is adopting ISO model for quality management activities in the University. According to the Vice Director, DTU chose ISO model for the purpose of improving the quality of their management activities, not for accreditation by ISO (DTU didn't register to be accredited by ISO). Therefore, they were not trained on how to implement it in the context of higher education institution. The Center was assigned to learn and develop the model by itself. Therefore, according to the Vice Director, it would take some time to see the effect of the implementation of this model in the University.

The Vice Director further stated that, DTU still does not establish information systems on quality. Data is still mainly stored on paper and manually by each functional unit in the University. Additionally, the information is not stored systematically, and it's difficult to combine units to work together on data collection and data analysis for quality improvement. DTU still hasn't developed the information monitoring system on quality for itself.

Besides the institutional self-evaluation report conducted every 5 years; the Center also conducts internal audit at the institutional level based on the MoET's accreditation standards. It is noticed that this internal audit is conducted in a simple listed way. Every academic year, in order to conduct internal audit, the Center prepares an excel file with a list of MoET's accreditation standards and send it to every unit at DTU; the unit just need to provide brief information and submit evidence to the Center in accordance with these criteria. The Assessment Committee often includes the Board (Rector or Vice Rector) and QAC's staff members. There are no peer reviews for the cross-check among the units.

As described the Vice Director, the Center were not responsible for developing evaluation instruments. The evaluation instruments were developed by other units in the University. The QAC will contact these units if they need the information when necessary. For example, the Department of Academic Affairs is in charge of conducting the survey on students; and Career Center is responsible for the survey on alumni and employers. Therefore, DTU's QAC also does not analyze students' information or stakeholders'

opinion to support the faculties in developing curriculum or program contents based on learning outcomes or to contribute to the development of quality assurance plans at university level.

An interview was also conducted with the Dean of one of the faculties in DTU. As described by this Dean, they do not have QAC officers at unit level. The faculty will assign suitable officers when there are activities related to quality assurance disseminated to his faculty. So far, his faculty hasn't conducted any program evaluation or course evaluation. Even though the faculty is implementing a credit-based system; the Dean also admitted that it's difficult to implement the system well due to the traditional teaching method (teacher-center method).

Furthermore, when discussed about staff development, the Dean mentioned that most of his academic staffs are still young and many of them still lack of experience in teaching; therefore, the University in general and his faculty in particular always create opportunities for teachers to improve their expertise through the short training courses. However, currently the faculty still has not design staff development courses based on their practical needs. This means that there is actually no explicit link to the quality assurance, leading to the situation that sometimes staff development couldn't serve the practical needs of the faculty. For example, teachers are not trained about designing a course, implementing ECTS, identifying learning outcomes or student assessment. Therefore, as stated by the Dean, even though there are periodic reviews of curriculum; there is no big improvement on the curriculum before and after the review. Additionally, the program contents are still designed not based on students' learning outcomes, which is one of the requirements for the implementation of credit system.

In summary, it can be revealed through this interview that IQA is conceptually implemented at Center level with some activities developed by the Center, for example the institutional self evaluation reports, internal evaluation at institutional level, and some other ISO activities. However, at faculty level, the process of assuring quality is not showed clearly: teacher-center teaching method still exists in the context of credit-based learning system; curriculum and program content was not improved base on students' information and stakeholders' opinion; and there is no explicit link between staff development and quality assurance arrangement.

- **Influential factors:**

When discussed about the importance of staff expertise in QA at the Center, the Vice Director considered it as highly important to the process of establishing the quality assurance system at DTU. Because most of his staffs members do not have expertise in QA or equivalent (educational management, for example), it's difficult for the QAC to fulfill its function of supporting the establishment of PCDA-cycles at institutional level or faculty level. For example, they couldn't involve in the development of quality standards for educational programs. The Center also has difficulty in assisting faculties and other units in data analysis and interpretation. Therefore, their tasks, at the end, are to assist the University in the process of conducting self evaluation and develop some quality-oriented activities according to the ISO model such as the quality assurance handbook. According to the Vice Director, capability personnel in QA (skills in data collection, data analysis, knowledge in curriculum design or the credit based system) will help the Center gain trust from other units as a role of supporters; and as the results, the Center's operation will be more effective. He also expected that there would be more opportunity for the non-public Universities like DTU to participate in projects about IQA and will be trained on the issue of IQA. The Vice Director argued that private Universities need more support in terms of capacity building on QA from MoET to implement the internal quality assurance effectively in accordance with the requirement of MoET.

As described by the Vice Director of DTU's QAC, the awareness of teachers toward the issue of quality assurance arrangement at DTU is also one of the factors that hamper the establishment of internal quality assurance system in DTU. According to him, DTU's QAC has difficulty in asking for the cooperation from units, especially from teachers. Although teachers have commitment to their expertise, they don't want to spend their time on quality assurance arrangement. Therefore, how to increase the awareness of

teachers toward the issue of quality assurance (increasing quality culture) becomes one of the objectives of the Center in the next few years in the process of assisting the University to establish the IQA system.

Additionally, the Vice Director as well as the Dean also emphasized the importance of the leadership to this issue. According to them, leadership is a decisive factor to the implementation of IQA in the University in the sense that the leaders should recognize the essential of IQA system toward the improvement of institutional quality, and should have strategic vision on the development of their University. Institutional leaders should also support and pay much attention on the quality assurance activities. The Vice Director also stated that without the support from senior leadership, QAC's tasks couldn't be fulfilled without any difficulties.

4.1.4 Case 4: Hoa Sen Private University (HSU)

- Short description of HSU:

Founded in 1991, Hoa Sen University (HSU) is one of the private Universities located in Ho Chi Minh City in the South of Vietnam. HSU has 4 faculties offering programs in vocational technician training, junior college, bachelor of arts/science and post graduate degrees. These are: Polytechnics Faculty, Faculty of Economics & Commerce, Faculty of Languages & Cultural Studies, and Department of Science and Technology. Currently HSU has 338 senior lectures, among whom there are 78.6% of lecturers with master's degree or higher, 1 professor, 2 assistant professors and 21 lecturers with PhD degree. Most of HSU's teaching staffs are trained abroad. The number of guest lecturers at HSU is 205, with 64% of lecturers having master degree or higher, 19 lectures with Ph.D degree and 3 Assistant Professors.

The aim of HSU is to prepare its students for employment in Vietnam's expanding and rapidly changing economy; and therefore HSU is applying student-centered educational methodology with an underlying philosophy of "commitment to excellent".

With reference to QA activities, HSU has accomplished its institutional internal evaluation in 2011. HSU didn't participate in any international projects related to QA activities.

- QAC:

The quality assurance center at HSU was established in 2008 under the name of "Quality Assurance-Inspection Center." According to the Director of the Center, the main functions and responsibilities of the Center include:

- Establishing programs and plans for assessing the quality of training
- Organizing activities for quality assurance
- Developing information and database system for quality assurance
- Coordinating with other units and faculty to conduct quality assessment activities
- Supporting faculties, departments and lecturers to develop criteria and measurement to conduct quality assessment activities.

Besides those functions and responsibilities, the Center also supports the University in the process of the self evaluation.

Even though the Center has come into the operation since 2008, it has not developed the quality assurance work plans, protocol or document to guide other units in the University in terms of quality assurance activities. Furthermore, this Center also does not establish or support a network of QA officers from faculties or other units in the University to effectively communicate on QA policy, procedure and to foster QA activities across the University.

In summary, as described, the Center basically provides QA services for the faculties, departments and other units within the University; and supports the self evaluation process as proclaimed by the MoET.

- **QA process:**

It was mentioned by the Rector of the University that as a non-profit private University; HSU always puts the issue of quality as its top priority. Therefore, the University has the long-term mission and middle-term mission prioritizing the importance of quality. According to the Rector, HSU has concentrated on developing its teaching staff and its educational programs with a focus on international cooperation, which is considered as a tool to achieve HSU's goal to become an internationally standards University.

As stated by the Director of the QAC, currently HSU does not adopt a clear quality management approach to develop its internal quality assurance system. Therefore, it was admitted by the Director of the QAC that quality assurance activities at HSU are not actually systematized. The University still doesn't have established an appropriate monitoring system serving the purpose of quality improvement. For this issue, the University's Rector expressed her expectation to adopt the training management software which can help the University to manage training tasks effectively. Through the interview with the University's Rector about this monitoring system issue, it can be observed that the Rector highly appreciated the modern, professional and computerized monitoring system, which showed evidence of the Rector's commitment to the development of quality management system at HSU despite the fact that HSU still hasn't applied that kind of monitoring system.

In terms of evaluation scheme at HSU, beside the institutional self evaluation report conducted every 5 years, HSU's QAC is also responsible for the internal audit activity, which is conducted every 2 years. With this internal audit activity, the QAC will review and give recommendation on: units' mission statement; units' functions, responsibilities and operational objectives; personnel organization; operational management.

Besides, there is a timetable at HSU to review the University's implementation plan every year, and strategic plans every five year. With the review of strategic plans, according to the University's Rector, she often organized it as a "management retreat", in which all of the Board's members, senior leaders and faculty leaders will have a few days off-site to accomplish a developmental objective for the University. With this activity, the Rector can communicate well to her staffs the importance of meeting the stakeholders' requirements. However, she also mentioned that even though this "management retreat" activity often results in a clearer and more coordinated plan with clear accountabilities and deadlines, there is still a situation that many evaluation results are often unsolved or many good feedbacks are not implemented.

With regard to evaluation instruments, according to the Director of QAC, the Center conducts surveys on the satisfaction of stakeholders including teachers and staffs, new graduates, new students. All of these data are analyzed (with the illustration of charts) and documented, and especially are compared to the pervious data. There is also a recommendation given by the Center based upon the results.

As mentioned by the Director of QAC, evaluation reports will be sent to related units, and teachers will also be informed about the results of their feedback. Based on evaluation reports, the Board requires related units to have an improvement plan. However, according to the Director of QAC, there are no consequences formulated, and teachers just get the warnings if the quality is not satisfied. According to the perspective of HSU's leaders, they don't want to impose the censure policy on their staffs.

In order to learn about IQA at HSU at lower level, a Dean of one of the faculties in HSU was also interviewed. As described by this Dean, one of the program in his faculty- the business program is in candidacy for accreditation by ACBSP (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs- US). According to the Dean, his faculty and his staff have benefited greatly from being a member of ACBSP. When preparing for accreditation, the Dean himself was trained in term of leadership and his staffs were provided professional development in the development of outcome assessments. Additionally, it was also admitted by this Dean that thanks to ACBSP, he and his staff members learnt more about quality assurance arrangement. For example, the curriculum is updated; program is evaluated and re-structured based on a standard guideline; student learning outcome was developed in sound way with the support

from the QAC, and particularly teachers pay more attention on assessment methods. “If these things (curriculum, program structure, or assessment methods) are not taken into account, the program will not be accredited by ACBSP”, as stated by the Dean. Therefore, it can be concluded that the preparation for the accreditation by ACBSP has at least helped the faculty have clearer procedures for quality assurance.

Besides, the faculty also applies the performance review (often conducted in July and August) and mid-term review in order to monitor teachers’ performance, and review the activities carried out teachers.

In addition, a closer look was taken on the HSU’s self evaluation report in order to further investigate quality assurance activities in teaching and learning process at HSU. As mentioned in this report, all the training programs were designed based on the core training program frame issued by MoET with the involvement of the faculties’ management officers and teachers. It was also stated that all the training programs have definite educational objectives relevant to University’s mission and objectives, and are periodically reviewed. However, there are still some weaknesses in the development of educational programs at HSU revealed in the report. For example, the comprehensive evaluation hasn’t been conducted on those training programs, the University has not officially collect feedback from employers when designing and establishing the training programs, and additionally not every faculty in the University collects the feedbacks on internship students from employers.

In general, it can be concluded that IQA is implemented at HSU. The top management of HSU has provided evidence to the development of quality management system: There is a communication to the organization the importance of meeting stakeholders’ customer requirement; establishing the QAC, and conducting program accreditation. It can be seen that the QAC of HSU has fulfilled its functions of providing QA services for the University, faculties and other units in the University; and also support the University as whole in the process of conducting self evaluation for accreditation. Even though there is program accreditation at HSU, it should be noticed that Business program is the only program is in candidacy for a foreign accreditation.

- **Influential factors:**

As described the University’s Rector, the quality structure at HSU is organized in a decentralized way and the responsibilities are well devolved to the lower levels in the University. As usual, the Rector described her role in managing finance, human resources; distribute appropriate teaching hours; and establishing coherent management procedures. The Rector highly emphasized the important role of the Dean in the process of assuring quality at the University. In her opinion, in order to promote the process of quality system, it is necessary to promote the involvement of middle management. Therefore, the Deans at HSU have been given much authority and of course together with lots of responsibilities. For example, the Deans can have authority in recruiting and dismiss teachers, and be responsible for the quality of program content, the timely curriculum, or the innovation in education. According to the University’s Rector, the good policy on rewarding employees can also encourage staff members to get more involved in the process of quality assurance.

In terms of the expertise in QA, the Director of the QAC argued that “expertise in QA is an important, needless to say, but it is not the decisive factors that may affect the IQA implementation in the University”. In her opinion, the personnel of the QAC need to be competent on the appropriate education, training and skills (SPSS or computer), and especially have a sufficient proficiency in English. Therefore, according to her, even though her staffs do not have expertise in QA, they still can manage QA tasks very well. When asked about the recruitment policy in the QAC, she strongly emphasized the English competence of the staff members.

She additionally emphasized the importance of training in QA in order to help the Universities know more about the notion of QA. She argued that, in the context of Vietnam, where QA was just newly introduced and where there is still no QA specialization taught at schools; the training on QA is truly necessary. According to her, QA training is needed in the sense that the notion and knowledge about QA can be spread out among Universities, especially the private Universities, so that they will understand more about

QA and can implement the quality system for quality improvement. According to her, currently, the role of QAC was not well recognized and rightly appreciated by the University's Board, causing some difficulties for the Center to take the actions. Therefore, the Director mentioned that the training on QA is not only essential for QA officers, but also for senior leadership as well as middle management at the University, so that the QA can be taken consistently in the University as the whole.

In terms of funding, in the Rector's opinion, it does not decide whether or not IQA is implemented well at the University. According to her, "if the University manages its budget well, then it can manage the issue of quality well. It depends on the management principles of each University". This means quality can be achieved in a limited budget and the financial constrain cannot hamper the process of sustaining and improving quality.

The Rector of the HSU also fully agreed with the degree of autonomy given to private Universities. As stated by her, the current degree of autonomy given by MoET does not interfere with the implementation of IQA in the University. From her point of view, she thought that all the policies regarding to the issue of autonomy, for example national curriculum framework or entrance exam, are reasonable and are in line with the social development oriented by the Government.

4.1.5 Case 5: Binh Duong Economics and Technology University (BDE&TU)

- Short description of the University

Binh Duong Economics and Technology University (BDE&TU) is a small and newly established University. It was upgraded from the College of Binh Duong Economics and Technology in 2010. BDE&TU is a non-public university in Binh Duong Province, located in southeastern part of Vietnam. Currently the University has 5 faculties, and the number of teaching staff is 447.

The University has just conducted the institutional self evaluation in 2010. It has not been visited by the external team therefore it still has not been accredited. BDE&TU didn't participate in any international projects related to QA.

- QAC:

The QAC at BDE&TU was established in 2009 under the name of "Inspection and Quality Assurance Unit". According to the Assistant Manager, the main function of the Center is to consult the University's Board about the activities of Inspection and QA in accordance with MoET's requirement.

As described by the Assistant Manager, the QAC is in charge of collecting document and evidence for conducting institutional self-evaluation; supporting the University in the process of carrying out self evaluation, and conducting surveys on teachers and students for the improvement of curricula. The Assistant Manager also mentioned that the main responsibility of the Center is actually for internal inspection, and quality assurance becomes secondary.

- QA process:

When asked about the quality management approach that the University is adopting to develop its own quality assurance system, the Assistant Manager stated that BDE&TU didn't apply any specific approach for IQA. The Assistant Manager also admitted that there are not many oriented-quality assurance activities conducted in the University. The monitoring system is simple: it does not include student evaluation, or student progress system or structural feedback from alumni. In terms of evaluation instrument, the University pays much attention on the self evaluation for accreditation by MoET. Beside this report, the University does not conduct internal evaluation at institutional level or program evaluation at faculty level. The Center also does not conduct internal audits for units at different levels in the University to support the establishment of PDCA cycle at institutional level as well as faculty level. Additionally, as stated by

the Assistant Manager, the evaluation instruments to collect relevant data on different aspects of the activities are still not available.

An interview was also conducted with Vice Dean of one of the faculties in BDE&TU. According to him, Dean is the one who is responsible for the quality issue in the faculty. In his opinion, the quality of training is attached with the quality of teachers. Therefore, he imposes a strict regulation on his teaching staffs. He often conducts regular and irregular observation (observation without giving notice in advance) on teachers to monitor their performance in class. Teachers are also required to take part in short training courses for their continuous improvement on their expertise, especially teaching methods, as emphasized by the Vice-dean.

This Vice-Dean also mentioned the regular review on the curriculum; however, he didn't mention what procedures and measures to be used to consider whether the curriculum remains appropriate for the program to be continued. Particularly, while the monitoring system which includes stakeholders' information (the satisfaction of students on the course) or views on the process of program (opinion of employers or teachers) is considered as an important input for the review of training programs, this monitoring system is missed in this faculty. There is no student survey conducted after each course, there is no survey on the views of stakeholders about the process of program including the views of teachers or employers. This may lead to the assumption that decisions or actions to improve quality or to remedy possible deficiencies for the training programs might not be made based on the reliable sources of information.

- **Influential factors:**

It was mentioned by both Assistant Manager of QAC and Vice Dean of the faculty that leadership is the most important factors toward the effective implementation of IQA system. According to the Vice Director, in order to manage well the quality of an institution, the senior leader should have a vision of his/her institution's future and have ability to communicate his/her vision or the vision of institution to his/her staffs.

Another factor which was assumed to hamper the IQA implementation by the Vice Dean of this faculty is MoET's regulation of accreditation. According to him, if MoET imposed clear statute of accreditation on the Universities, for example, there should be a ranking among accredited universities; then it is believed that the Universities will pay more attention to the implementation of IQA. This could be a good idea because with this way, the University will be forced to reach quality standards through accreditation. From that point, in order to do so, the system of accreditation should be closely linked to the institution's IQA system.

Furthermore, the Assistant Manager mentioned the necessary of training in QA. According to him, since the personnel in the QAC have no expertise in QA, they have difficulties in fulfill QA tasks. However, as he misunderstood QA tasks as self evaluation activity; he expected that there would be more training courses in carrying out the institutional self evaluation report so that he could understand more about the MoET's accreditation standards.

In summary, through the investigation in QA process at the QAC level and faculty level, it can be seen that the IQA system hasn't developed in the University. In other words, the University doesn't have an adequate system of IQA in place, for example, the training programs are not regularly evaluated; the institutional self-evaluation, not for the purpose of accreditation, is not carried out; and the support unit is the not well established.

It can be revealed from the case of BDE&TU that the personnel for the QAC are not well prepared for QA works. As stated by Assistant Manager, he doesn't have sufficient proficiency in English and none of personnel in the Center are competent in skills for QA (developing survey questionnaires, statistical skills...). Moreover, through the interview, the Assistant Manager showed a degree of confusion about the nature of IQA; in particular, the confusion between IQA and part of the accreditation process, which is the

institutional self evaluation as when describing the IQA activities, he spoke only activities taken for the University's self-evaluation. This problem in human resources in the quality Center of BDE&TU may be the reason for ineffective operation of the Center.

4.1.6 Case 6: University of Economics: UEH

- Short description of UEH:

Founded 1996, UEH is a multi-disciplinary public University located in Ho Chi Minh City- the South of Vietnam. The University has various levels and modes of education, from BA to PhDs. Its primary objective is to provide policy makers, administrators and experts in economics and business administration. UEH is also a center for scientific research, focusing on economic discovery, analysis and economic theories. UEH is currently training 7 majors with 23 specializations and has 14 faculties. The number of teaching staffs in UEH has been increasing to 692 staffs in recent years, including 497 senior lecturers and 213 guest lecturers.

UEH conducted its self evaluation in 2007 and was accredited in 2009. UEH didn't attend any international projects.

- Quality assurance center:

QAC in UEH was established under the name of "Office of Testing and Quality Assurance" in 2008. The QAC's organizational structure comprises: 1 Manager, 1 Assistant Manager and 15 staffs. The Center has two main functions: consulting the Board about the activities for testing and accreditation; and carrying out the activities of testing and accreditation in the University. Regarding quality assurance activities, according to the Manager, the UEH's QAC is responsible for:

- Researching and developing the total solutions for assuring institutional quality, developing programs, teaching methods and assessment methods;
- Cooperating with other units to develop the evaluation instruments to collect relevant data on educational programs, teachers, students, alumni;
- Conducting institutional self evaluation;
- Organizing some workshops to help other units within the University understand more about the criteria in the MoET's accreditation standards, about how to collect evidence and how to write the self evaluation;
- Consulting and following up the accreditation activities in other units of the University.

Additionally, as described by the Manager, the protocol and documents relating to accreditation standards are publicly available on the Center's website or sometimes the QAC's staffs members will directly consult the relevant units about accreditation criteria in case that unit has difficulty in interpreting the those criteria of the MoET's accreditation standards.

The Manager further described that his Center doesn't establish a network of quality satellite; which means there are no quality officers at other units in the University. There are 15 staffs in the Center, 5 of them are especially responsible for quality assurance activities and the rest are in charge of testing activities. However, according to him, sometimes there is no clear distinction between these two tasks in the Center. This means sometimes his staffs have to be responsible for both tasks (testing and QA) depending on the situation. For example, when the exam season comes, testing activities will be put on priority; as a result, all of staffs are required to focus on testing activities. This situation may result in the fact that QA activities become secondary at EUH.

When asked about the responsibilities of the Center for the quality management activities in other units within the University, the Manager once again mentioned that the Center is responsible for the

institutional self evaluation, researching on the program accreditation, and monitoring the process of writing the institutional self evaluation conducted by other units in the University.

In summary, the Manager of the Center didn't distinguish the activities for internal quality assurance and the activities for conducting institutional self evaluation in accreditation process. When he was asked to describe the responsibilities of the Center for the quality assurance activities in other units within the University, the Manager highly emphasized the activities for preparing the institutional self evaluation, which is considered as a part of the accreditation process. This may show that the Manager is considering internal quality assurance activities as the preparation activities for accreditation. Therefore, it can be assumed that the QAC of EUH just fulfill only one function, which is assisting the unit at different levels within the University to accomplish the institutional self evaluation report.

- **QA process:**

As stated by the Manager, EUH has a clear long-term mission, which is publically available in its campus and its website; therefore, most of academic staffs and students are well aware of the University's missions. Based on the mission, EUH also defined clearly its objectives, which were included in the University's development strategy toward 2020.

In addition, the Manager also mentioned that EUH has a good management mechanism with a transparent document system; and documentary is stored systematically. Moreover, the authorities and responsibilities of leaders, teachers and staffs are clearly defined, carefully documented and well disseminated in the University.

EUH also conduct the periodic review on its long-term plans by reviewing each educational objective (there are 9 educational objectives in the general plan of EUH) every year as in the following procedures: at the end of the academic year, EUH will evaluate the accomplishment of the aforementioned objectives; the documentary will be disseminated to other units. Units will consider and produce units' annual objectives, as well as propose or contribute to help the University adjust its educational objectives (if necessary). EUH will summary, consider and adjust the educational objectives of each academic year. Based on that, the units will carry out the annual educational objectives.

However, according to the Manager, EUH hasn't developed a general monitoring system to monitor QA activities at the primary process, and therefore the QA activities within EUH are not actually carried out in a systematic way. It was also added by the Manager that the University didn't apply any quality management models for the development the internal quality assurance system, but followed the national QA framework and guidelines (accreditation standards) to manage its QA activities.

EUH doesn't establish the sound monitoring systems which many include the information of student progression and successful rates, average grade, or graduates' employment or feedback from the labor market and alumni. Therefore, the review of curriculum or the new development of training programs does not include the participation of relevant stakeholders.

With regards to the evaluation instruments, as stated by the Manager, the Center cooperates with the Department of Training Management-Student Affairs to develop the feedback system, including the surveys on the satisfaction of stakeholders: teachers and staffs, new graduates, new students and employers. According to the Manager, these data are used in the review of curriculum.

Additionally, besides the regular review of curriculum, EUH does not evaluate the effectiveness of other activities which are not directly related to the training programs. For example, as mentioned in the report, EUH had the staff development program; however, it was not evaluated to see whether or not the program could achieve the quality as design. Moreover, after the accreditation, EUH does not conduct internal evaluation or internal audit at faculty level. It is believed that the institutional mission and plans should also be taken into account, especially if there are any changes in the external environment, even in the absence of accreditation.

An interview was also carried out with the Dean of one of the faculties in EUH. As described by this Dean, EUH has a clear devolution of authorities and responsibilities for the issue of quality. According to him, Dean plays a role of generally steering and monitoring QA activities in his faculty; and the role of Head of the Subject is to support Dean by providing academic leadership in the relevant subject area. There is a monthly meeting where Head of the Subject has to report to the Dean.

With the regards to QA activities in his faculty, the Dean mentioned that the educational objectives were established based on the University's mission and objectives, and always publically available to students. It's also easy for the students in his faculty to look for information relating to program contents, training schedule and testing scores on the faculty's website. In his perspective on educational quality, good facilities should be created in order to motivate the participation of students. However, when the teaching-learning process was discussed further with him, it was revealed that his faculty has not developed the students' expected learning outcomes. The Dean also admitted that the faculty has not had procedures to develop, monitor and evaluate the exam bank, which means the faculty has not had paid enough attention on the importance of student assessment. Additionally, the data of students' test scores are not analyzed statistically for the evaluation of testing methods as well as the judgment for the difficulty level of exams.

In terms of staff development, according to this Dean, EUH always has clear supporting plans for staff development activities organized in Vietnam and abroad. He further mentioned that every academic year training courses at EUH are opened for teachers and staff members to improve their expertise as well as their management capacity. Senior lecturers at EUH are particularly encouraged and financially supported to earn Ph.D degree during their time teaching at EUH.

A closer look was taken to further examine the quality assurance process on teaching-learning activities at EUH through its institutional self evaluation report. It was revealed that all the training programs were designed based on MoET's framework with the involvement of the academic committee and teachers; and the training programs were also periodically reviewed. This report also mentioned that EUH organized a "Career Day" seminar with the participation of employers, students and trainers to collect their contributing opinions for the review of curriculum. However, this activity is not carried out regularly, leading to the situation that the activity of feedback collection from employers has not actually conducted regularly.

In summary, in this case, the management process at University level was well developed and operating effectively through a well established documentary system with a clear devolution of responsibilities and authorities among teachers, staffs and leaders in EUH. However, there is still a disregard of quality assurance activities at the primary process.

- **Influential factors:**

As described, the quality structure at EUH is organized in a decentralized way and the responsible are well devolved to the lower levels in the University. The role of Dean and Head of Subjects are highly emphasized in the process of achieving educational quality of EUH; therefore, a certain degree of autonomy is given to the faculty. For example, the faculty can propose to implement the curriculum which they think is suitable for their students; or they can volunteer to conduct self evaluation for the purpose of preparing for program accreditation.

Leadership is considered as one of the most influential factors to the process of establishing IQA system at EUH. The Manager of the Center stated that "leadership is very important. A leader must believe in the central of tenets of quality, and know how to achieve it". This can be interpreted that management should be convinced of the need for quality improvement and there should be full commitment to the development of a system in order to achieve desired quality. Additionally, leaders must be well aware of the implementation of that quality system; then from that point, encourage the establishment of it in other units within the University through the middle management. This once again implies the balance of centralization and decentralization way of management on the process of implementing IQA in the University.

With regards to the expertise in QA, even though the Manager mentioned the importance of skill and knowledge in QA in helping QA staff fulfill QA tasks in the University, he also does not have any plans or policies to recruit the employee with expertise in QA. Most of his staffs have specialization on computer or business administration. According to him, this is because there are not many people having specialization on QA in Vietnam. The Manager himself also does not have expertise in QA. Therefore, as stated by him, the short training courses about QA activities are very useful for the higher education institutions in helping them develop an IQA system. He especially emphasized the QA knowledge on QA assessment, internal audit or quality measurement.

When discussed about the difficulties that EUH has in developing the quality assurance process, the management mentioned staffs' involvement. According to him, it's necessary to increase staffs' awareness toward the importance of IQA in the University's development. In other words, it's necessary to develop quality culture in the University. This is one of the challenges of EUH on the process of establishing IQA system, as mentioned by the Manager. He further stated that since most of teachers at EUH are really commit to their expertise, they don't want to waste their time on the teaching-unrelated tasks, for example: conducting self evaluation, cooperating to build up exam bank for the faculty, or discuss to define students' learning outcome for the program.

4.1.7 Case 7: University of Social Science and Humanities (USSH)

- Short description of USSH:

Established in 1957, USSH is one of the public Universities located at Ho Chi Minh City in the South of Vietnam. As of 2010, USSH has a total of 750 academic and non-academic staff, 480 of whom are teaching members, including 30 Professors, 131 Doctors, and 221 Masters.

The USSH now has 2 campuses. There are now more than 30,000 undergraduate students studying in the two campuses. Besides undergraduate programs, USSH also offers courses at post graduate levels including master degree and doctoral degree.

With reference to QA activities, USSH finished its institutional self evaluation in 2009 and was accredited in 2010. USSH is not a beneficiary of any international projects in relation to QA.

- QAC:

QAC in USSH was established in 2006 under the name of "Office of Educational Testing and Quality Assurance". The Center has 11 staffs comprising 1 Manager, 2 Assistant Managers and 9 specialists. The Center also has a network of satellite, including 21 QA teams in administrative units and 26 QA teams in training units (faculties). Those satellites will carry out QA plans and activities in unit level in accordance with the QA plans set by QAC.

The Center has 2 main functions: testing and quality assurance. Regarding the QA activities, the Center is responsible for:

- Developing all regulation and guiding document for all IQA activities in the University
- Consulting, monitoring and supervising the implementation of QA activities in all units of the University
- Organizing and monitoring the progress and results of the instructional self evaluation activities in the University according to MoET's accreditation standards
- Organizing and monitoring the progress and results of the program self evaluation according to AUN's standards; as well as conducting internal audit for the University as the whole
- Researching and developing the instruments for self evaluation (questionnaires, surveys...)
- Organizing seminar, workshop, training courses regarding to QA activities, institutional self evaluation and external evaluation for managers, faculty and staffs
- Developing quality culture in the University

According to the QAC's Assistant Manager, the QAC already accomplished the development of strategic plan for 2011-2015, highlighting the importance of standardizing the working teams, enhancing QA activities, and enhancing facilities and finance resources. Besides the strategic plan, HSSU's QAC also produces annual work plan with specific objectives for each academic year.

Additionally, the Center developed a set of standards for internal audit control based on the MoET's accreditation standards. The internal audit control has been already implemented in 41 units including 18 administrative units and 23 training units.

The QAC also cooperated with other units to accomplish 3 program self evaluation reports based on AUN's standards.

In general, the QAC at USSH, as describe by the Assistant Manager, with the establishment of QAC and QA officers in other units within the University, it seemed that the responsibilities for QA were well devolved to lower level within CTU, which may support the involvement of colleges, faculties or departments in the processes related to quality assurance and accreditation.

- **QA process:**

The University has a long-term mission and values of importance to quality. The mission is publically available on the University's website and well communicated to all staff members. University's mission and educational objectives are periodically reviewed. However, the QAC's Assistant Manager showed that the evaluation results are not well followed up at unit level.

With regards to monitoring system, USSH is adopting ISO 9000 model to monitor their activities through the documentary system. Therefore, all the activities at the University are managed based on clear procedures and forms, supporting the easy cooperation among functional units or faculties in the University. Problems, thanks to that, are also solved easily. Moreover, the authorities and responsibilities of leaders, teachers and staffs are clearly defined in the University. However, as mentioned by the Assistant Manager, USSH still has not developed a complete management information system (with students' pass/fail rate, employer's feedback...) which can serve as a useful database to monitor the quality assurance activities at faculty level.

In reference to evaluation instruments, HSSU developed a set of evaluation instruments, including survey on satisfaction of students, teachers and staff, survey on alumni, and survey on employers. According to the Assistant Manager, all of data from these surveys are analyzed and documented. The result of students' feedback on teachers and educational programs are also confidentially informed to relevant faculties and teachers. However, these data are not effectively followed up at the faculty level. Therefore, the Assistant Manager further stated that one of the weaknesses in USSH is that most of curricular in the University have not reviewed and improved based on the feedback of stakeholders.

Besides the institutional self evaluation conducted every 5 years, since 2009, USSH has developed the internal quality audit system applying for administrative units and training units. With this system, the faculties/units will be evaluated every 2 years. Besides, the University has also encouraged 5 faculties to conduct the program self evaluation according to AUN's standards. However, according to the QAC's Assistant Manager, not every unit within the University carries out the internal audit activity (which is based on MoET's standards). Additionally, regarding to the program internal evaluation (which is based on AUN's standards), the 5 faculties have found it difficult for them to follow and satisfy AUN's standards due to the lack of experience in operating their program according to international standards.

In terms of staff development, the Assistant Manager said that USSH has paid much attention on the staff development. Staff members are encouraged to improve their expertise, especially the teaching methods. USSH also focuses on supporting staff in improving their English language and computer capacity. Additionally, it was added by the Assistant Manager that young teachers at USSH are always fully supported to pursue the postgraduate degree, namely Master's degree or Ph.D degree in Vietnam and abroad.

Besides the interview with the Assistant Manager of HSSU's QAC, its institutional self evaluation was also further reviewed in order to investigate the QA process covering teaching-learning activities at USSH. As written in the report, all the training programs were designed systematically and had detailed curriculum. The educational objectives were publically available on the University's website; and furthermore, there is a participation of stakeholders (students and teachers) in the periodic review of curriculum in USSH. Nevertheless, it was revealed in the report that USSH has not yet regularly collected the feedback from employers and professional associations.

- **Influential factors**

The Assistant Manager argued that the notion of QA is very abstract and intangible; therefore the University's lower level (faculty level) still does not understand this issue correctly. As a result, the faculties actually do not want to involve in QA activities. They do not see the necessary of the IQA system in the University. As stated by the Assistant Manager, some staff members think that USSH is a prestige University and they do not need to worry about the issue of quality because USSH has a very excellent teaching resource (many teachers at USSH are Doctors or Assistant Professors). They also do not trust the role of QAC in supporting them to assure the educational quality, and they think some QA activities, namely internal audit or program evaluation are unnecessary. Consequently, QAC has many difficulties in developing QA activities, leading to the situation that IQA system cannot be implemented throughout the whole university.

As a result, the Assistant Manager highly emphasized the expertise in QA when she was asked about the influential factors to the establishment of IQA system in the University. According to her, the lack of expert in QA has made the issue of quality assurance in Vietnam's higher education be in crisis. QA officers at most of the Universities are really in need of being trained on QA expertise. However, she also stated that, the short training courses, held by MoET, are not very effective: the training content is too general, the content is repeated, and the training is organized like an experience-sharing meeting.

The Assistant Manager further stated that there is also mistrust between the Universities and MoET regarding to the issue of accreditation. According to her, even though many Universities have been using MoET's standards to develop their own internal audit system, this set of accreditation standards is not really optimal: some criteria are not well defined, some criteria are "sentiment" and difficult to evaluate...As a result, conducting institutional self evaluation actually does not have good effect in helping the University pay attention to the establishment of IQA system.

4.1.8 Case 8: Hue University's College of Education

- **Short discription of HUCE:**

Established in 1957, HUCE is located in central Vietnam. At present, HUCE has 13 faculties offering 17 bachelor programs, 27 master programs and 6 doctoral programs. Regarding the number of staff members, HUCE has 270 teaching staffs including, 20 Assistant Professors, 76 Doctors, 143 teachers with master's degree and 79 teachers with bachelor degree.

In respect to QA activities, HUCE finished its self evaluation report in 2006, and was accredited in 2007. Being a member of Hue University, HUCE is a public University which did not take part in any international projects in relation to QA.

- **QAC:**

An interview was conducted with the Manager of QAC. According to him, the Quality Assurance Center in HUCE was established in 2010 under the name of "Office of Assessment- Quality Assurance in Higher Education". The Center has 6 staff members, including 1 Manager, 1 Assistant Manger and 4 specialists. The Center also established a QA network in other training units at HUCE.

HUCE's QAC has 2 main functions: testing and quality assurance. Regarding the QA activities, the Center is responsible for:

- Organizing training activities to improve the capacity of academic and non-academic staffs in testing, accreditation and quality assurance
- Consulting the Board to implement the activities related to testing, accreditation and quality assurance.
- Cooperating with other Universities to exchange information, experiences, and expertise in QA
- Organizing and implementing research activities related to testing, accreditation, and quality assurance at institutional level and above.

When discussed about working plans, the Manager stated that QA plans are made by the QAC and approved by the Board. The plans are made based on the University's annual plan and some of QAC's regular activities, for example the conduct of program evaluation planned by MoET, the conduct of "educational disclose" reports, the conduct of students' survey on teachers and alumni's survey on the courses. The Manager also added that all documents guiding the implementation of QA tasks are widely disseminated to the faculties, related departments through the QAC's website or missive.

- **QA process:**

According to the QAC's Manager, the University has a long-term mission which is publicly available on University's website, brochure and in the place where it is easily noticed in University's campus. EUCE also developed strategies, short-term as well as medium-term plans, which are consistent with local and national social-development.

When asked about the quality assurance approach that is being applied at the University, the Manager stated that EUCE is adopting SWOT model. As he said, based on SWOT model, the University will evaluate its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as input information for the establishment of QA plans. Besides, the Manager also mentioned P-D-C-A procedures, adopted for the University's continuous improvement.

Regarding monitoring system, it was stated by the Manager that "EUCE has established a QA network, where the QAC is the central coordinating all the activities related to QA through the University. Every academic year, based on the information from monitoring system, QAC consults the Board to make decisions on adjusting educational objectives, or curriculum contents". From this answer, it seemed the Manager misunderstood what monitoring system is and it is used for. It also can be referred from this Manager's answer that monitoring system has actually not been developed in EUCE.

With respect to evaluation instrument, according to the Manager, the periodic reviews at institutional level and program level are carried out based on MoET's general plan and EUCE's annual plan. Besides, EUCE also regularly conducts students' survey on teachers, University's infrastructure and facilities, library, and academic support for students. He further stated that the students' surveys on teachers are carried out twice a year and alumni's surveys are conducted once a year.

As far as evaluation results at EUCE is concerned, it was said that feedback results on teachers are confidential and only selectively sent to the related teacher and Deans and senior leaders (but teachers' name are not revealed). The surveys on courses are sent to senior leaders, Deans and related departments. Also, the Manager added that based on the information collected from aforementioned surveys, teachers, Deans and senior leaders will make some adjustments on teaching methods, institutional management and University's service. Regarding feedback on teachers, at present, there are no consequences made based on teachers' feedback results. And with regard to course evaluation, if the quality is not satisfied, related faculties will be reminded by the Board, and there are also no definite consequences formulated.

Besides the self evaluation report prepared for the University to be accredited, the Manager also further stated that EUCE's QAC still has not developed internal audits for units at different levels in the

University so that it can actually consult these units with the establishment of PDCA cycle for their activities as expected.

In terms of staff development, the Manager emphasized that EUCE always has measures to encourage teachers to improve their teaching skills and methods. Especially teachers are provided with good condition so that they can enhance students' learning through their student-centered teaching strategies. Moreover, EUCE also organized many conferences to help teachers exchange their knowledge, teaching experience as well as gain new insight on the application of credit system which is newly adopted at the University.

- **Influential factors**

In the discussion with the Manager about factors that potentially affect the IQA implementation at EUCE, he argued that the developing the system of IQA would take much time and would require human capacity in QA, it must be done in the consensus of senior leadership and grassroots. As it can be interpreted from the Manager's point of view, leadership at all levels should be pulled in the same direction and there should be a balance between top down steer and bottom up responsibilities to promote QA process in the Universities. Besides, according to him, having adequate financial resources to invest into the facilities for teaching and learning is also a challenge to EUCE.

In addition, even though the QAC's Manager is fully aware of the importance of quality culture to encourage the participation of all staff members in QA activities at EUCE, it was emphasized that EUCE still cannot organize training courses about QA for its employees, but they just would send their employees to relevant training courses supported by MoET or some other QA projects. Further, the Manager added that Vietnam's Universities, in general, have tried to establish an effective system of IQA; however, for the scarcity in capable personnel (experts in QA), QA activities in most of the Universities are more or less similar with administrative activities, not yet professional and does not bring any actual effect on quality management.

Further, when the issue of how to promote QA process at Universities in Vietnam in general, MoET's regulations on QA were mentioned by the Manager as a factor that may affect University's ability to implement IQA, especially QA training for Universities supported by MoET. At this point, he once again emphasized the importance of human capacity in QA to enable University to implement IQA effectively. In his opinion, this is the biggest challenge to Vietnam's higher education system, regarding QA issue. The majority of QA staffs are not well-trained. Therefore, according to the Manager, the support for QA training for specialized QA staffs in the Universities is urgently needed. He believed that when QA staffs can get well-trained in QA, IQA processes in the Universities can be implemented in the right procedures, ensuring positive results on the IQA implementation.

Last but not least, when he was asked whether there are any difference in IQA implementation between public Universities and non-public Universities, the Manager stated that for the competition in attracting students' registration, it seemed non-public Universities pay more attention on establishment of IQA system as compared to public University. More particularly, in his opinion, regarding IQA implementation, Universities are different in the attitude toward the important role of IQA to University's development.

4.1.9 Case 9: Thai Nguyen University (TNU):

- **Short description of TNU:**

Founded in 1994, TNU is located in Thai Nguyen Province in northeastern Vietnam. TNU is one of the important regional Universities in Vietnam. (In Vietnam, Universities are classified into 3 classes: national Universities, regional Universities and Universities). Currently, TNU has 7 University members, 1 vocational school and 2 faculties. Regarding the number of teaching staffs, TNU has approximately 2362

staffs, including 6 Professors, 86 Assistant Professors, 267 Doctors, 1472 Masters and 1528 Bachelors. As of 2011, TNU has 1.570 undergraduate students. Besides undergraduate programs, TNU also offers courses at postgraduate levels including master degree and doctoral degree.

Regarding QA activities, as a regional Universities managing many other University members, TNU is responsible for steering its University members to conduct self evaluation reports. At present, there are 6 University members conducting self evaluation reports, in which 3 Universities were accredited by MoET. TNU is one of 5 public Universities which took part in the international projects.

- **QAC:**

The QAC at TNU was established in 2005 under the name of “Inspection, Testing, & Education Quality Assessment Department” with the support from Profqim project. The QAC has 4 staff members. It also has a QA network including 8 QA teams from 8 University members. Those QA teams are responsible for carrying out QA activities at their Universities.

As mentioned in the name of the Center, TNU’s QAC has 3 main functions: inspecting, testing and quality assurance. Regarding QA activities, the Center is responsible for:

- Assisting the Board to steer and implement policies, MoET’s legal documents related to quality assurance activities within the whole University. Assisting the Board to develop the system of IQA through the establishment of QA network in Universities members.
- Consulting the Board to establish strategic plans, proposing QA roadmap for TNU, establishing and developing quality culture in TNU, as well as assist the Board to implement the set plans.
- Supporting University members and other training units in TNU to establish accreditation plans based on MoET’s accreditation standards. Approaching foreign accreditation, and preparing the conditions for international integration in accreditation and evaluation
- In June of each year, guiding QA teams in University members to conduct self evaluation reports. Based on those reports, the Center will make a summary report and submit it to the Board in October of each year.
- Steering QA teams to establish evaluation procedures (for example, evaluating strategic plans, curriculum designing plans, innovating teaching methods). Evaluating QA activities in TNU as a whole (every 6 months)
- Planning and organizing training courses about QA for staff members in TNU (every 6 months)
- Steering University members to conduct survey on teachers, students, labor market about the issue of educational quality and factors ensuring the quality.

According to the QAC’s Manager, the QAC already accomplished QA strategic plan for 2011-2016, and based on this strategic plan, QA annual plan will also be developed.

Additionally, the QAC also developed QA documents, QA implementation procedures for QA teams in University members. Especially, the TNU’s QAC has also imposed management contracts, emphasizing the explicit devolution of responsibilities, regarding QA activities, between University President and University members’ Rector, and between faculties and related departments.

Further to peer review, QAC has conducted peer review for 5 University members, and plans to carry out peer review on other 2 University member in 2013.

In general, with structure of QAC-QA teams and QA coordinators at faculty level in TNU’s QA system, the Manager affirmed that responsibilities for QA activities were well devolve to the possible lower levels in TNU.

- **QA Process:**

In the interview with QAC’s Manager, he stated that TNU has developed explicit mission and always serious about maintaining quality standards as set by MoET. The mission and educational objectives are

available on TNU's website and periodically reviewed in a 5 yearly cycle and a 6 monthly cycle respectively.

When asked about monitoring system, the Manager revealed that TNU is adopting the EFQM model to monitor their activities. However, he also admitted that TNU still does not have effective monitoring system. Particularly, data and information are still stored manually through some documents, for example the missive or decision issued in the University. The Manager hoped that in the near future, TNU can computerize the monitoring system so that management and administrative activities in TNU as well as its University member can be improved, thus enable QA activities to be conducted effectively.

Regarding evaluation instruments, according to the QAC's Manager, TNU has developed questionnaires for course and subject evaluation, and conducted surveys on alumni and employers. As described by him, the evaluation results on teachers will be confidentially send to teachers, but just in the case that teachers get bad feedback from their students. Also, there are no consequences formulated if course/subject evaluation results are not satisfied.

Besides self evaluation reports, TNU has also conducted program evaluation in University members. According to the Manager, TNU developed a set of standards for program evaluation based on AUN's standards, including 8 standards and 36 criteria. University members are required to evaluate at least 2 programs each year. So far, TNU has evaluated 10 educational programs. However, the Manager especially did not mention the improvement plans after these program evaluations. It seems that evaluation results are actually not followed up well at lower level.

In order to further investigate the quality assurance process that cover teaching-learning activities at TNU, the self evaluation report provided by a University member of TNU- Thai Nguyen University of Agriculture and Forest, was closely examined. The self report revealed that all curricular of the University were designed based on MoET's framework with the involvement of the academic committee and teachers; and all curricular were also periodically reviewed. However, the weakness point mentioned in this report is that the conduct of survey on employers and alumni to collect related information used to review or adjust curriculum (if necessary) are not carried out regularly.

- **Influential factors:**

When discussed about the factors that may support or hamper the development of effective system of IQA in TNU, the Manager highly emphasized that "the most difficulty hampering IQA implementation derives from the staff members' awareness toward the important role of IQA in the University". Therefore, according to him, leadership is very important, mostly deciding the success of IQA processes in the University.

Another factor mentioned by the Manager is the issue of finance. In his opinion, self evaluation is costly, and so is accreditation. He stated that "even though effective, accreditation cost a lot of money and involve a lot of people. Therefore, University has to pay extra salary for teachers or staffs who are also responsible for a part of accreditation process". He further added that in order to help staff members understand more about QA, TNU has to organize QA training courses for them, which also cost University much money to invite local consultants.

When discussed about how to promote the implementation of IQA in the Universities, the Manager said that through accreditation, MoET should impose explicit consequences on the University that does not meet quality standards; especially MoET should impose a fine on unqualified University. Additionally, QA training should be also taken into account, especially the training for senior leaders at the Universities.

4.1.10 Case 10: Da Nang University (DNU):

- **Short description of DNU:**

Established 1994, DNU is a regional multi-disciplinary University in Central Vietnam. In line with Thai Nguyen University (TNU), DNU is one of three regional Universities in Vietnam with a wide variety of training levels. As of 2007, DNU consist of 6 University members, 17 centers for training, scientific research promotion and technology transfer, and 1 journal of Science and Technology. At present, DNU has 1300 academic staffs and 37.000 students. Besides undergraduate programs, DNU also offers courses at postgraduate levels, including 17 programs for doctoral degree, and 29 programs for master's degree.

Regarding to QA activities, at present, 4 University members conducted self evaluation reports, in which 2 Universities were accredited.

- **QAC:**

As only University President responded to the interview request, and as the QAC's Manager and one of the Deans would not like to cooperate in this study; the interview results in DNU referred to the interview with the University President. Due to the limited time as well narrow interview scope with University Present, the information on QA process at DNU could not be fully exploited from the interview.

With respect to QA structure at DNU, the QAC at DNU was first founded in 2005 under the name of "Center for Quality Assurance" with the support of Profqim project. In 2010, the "Department for Quality Assurance" was established to replace the "Center for Quality Assurance". Beside this Center, QA network was also established within DNU. The QA network includes 4 QA teams from 4 out of 6 University members. With this structure, QAC will be responsible for steering QA activities in general and QA teams will be mainly responsible for QA activities in their University.

Regarding QA personnel, it was mentioned that the QAC does not have full time staffs. There is actually one staff who is also the Manager of the Center. At QA teams, there are approximately 3-6 staff members.

Regarding functions and responsibilities of QAC and QA teams, it was revealed that there is one QA team takes into account of including their function and responsibilities on its website. Functions and responsibilities with respect to QA are not available on the websites of QAC and other 3 QA teams. Particularly, one QA team even does not have its own webpage on the University's website.

It can be referred that even though DNU have set up its QA network with the establishment of QA teams at each University members, these 4 networks do not show explicitly their operations. This may lead to the assumption that the role of QA activities are not taken seriously in DNU.

- **QA process:**

It was revealed that general mission was developed within DNU and publicly available on its website. According to the University President, DNU also established and disseminated QA policies and QA objectivities to each University members. However, at the level of University member, it was shown that not every members of DNU declared their mission, educational objectives, or quality policies on their websites.

In terms of evaluation instrument, most of University members have developed the questionnaires to collect feedback on new graduates, alumni and students' satisfaction. However, they still have difficulties in solving the evaluation results as the process to add information collected from the survey and analyze information are still conducted manually.

Besides the development of questionnaires to for the conduct of surveys and besides the conduct of self evaluation, there are no other QA activities at most of the University member of DNU. Particularly, there are no internal audits or program evaluations happening at DNU level as well as institutional level.

- **Influence factors:**

It was mentioned by University President that responsibilities for QA are well devolved throughout the DNU. According to him, Rectors are the one who have to be primarily responsible for the quality of his University; therefore, responsibilities for quality are placed in the hands of Rector at each University

members. At this level, Rectors will steer QA activities to faculties and require the Deans' involvement in the issue of quality. This is also the reason this President highly emphasized the role of leadership as a factor can influence the success of IQA process. According to him, quality assurance could not be achieved in a short time; therefore, the senior leadership, Rector as well as Dean all play a very important role in issuing appropriate long-term strategies and implementing set plans to ensure that targets are achieved.

The President further stated that DNU is striving to follow the model of quality assurance from abroad. As described by him, the University of Technology is establishing its IQA system based on ABET model. Accordingly, DNU invited international experts to consult and trained the University of Technology about how to design curriculum to be appropriate with ABET standards. At present, this University member has 2 programs accredited by accreditation agencies from abroad. With this accreditation, DNU did not pay for it; but got supported French Government. It was also revealed from this interview with the DNU's President that he mainly mentioned program accreditation when discussing quality assurance activities. As he said, "accreditation is very important nowadays, it is a tool to help University get cooperation with international Universities from abroad"; therefore, in the near future, DNU would try to accredit as many programs as possible.

When QA activities at faculty level were discussed with the University President, he stated that at the moment, faculties primarily manage their quality based on the establishment of curriculum's learning outcome standards. This part of interview with DNU's President also revealed his point of view on the notion of quality assurance. As stated by him, DNU paid much attention on activities for international cooperation to promote educational quality in DNU. He argued that, through international cooperation, the University can benefit from teaching resources (exchange teachers), modern technology, and new methods of teaching as well as good reputation. The President further added that, assuring educational quality needs good facilities and good teaching resources. From this point of view, DNU focuses on cooperating with international companies or abroad as well as some Universities abroad to develop a program so called "Higher Engineering Education Alliance Program". He believed that with this kind of program, educational quality in his University can be assured.

Regarding how to promote QA process in the Universities, DNU's President argued that as most of the Universities still do not have institution councils; which may affect the effectiveness of policy implementation at lower level in the University. Therefore, in his opinion, the President thought that the Resolutions of the Party can help to force Universities to pay more attention on IQA. What he meant here is that most of the senior leadership and important persons of the University often participate in the Resolutions of the Party; therefore, if the Resolutions of the Party also include the issue of quality assurance in higher education, it can increase these people's awareness toward QA. As a result, "if all of these persons are aware of the importance of accreditation; they would strive to implement IQA in their Universities", as stated by the President. In other words, it may be interpreted that external factors at State level is needed to promote IQA process in Universities.

When the issue of QA expertise was discussed, the President considered it as highly important to QA activities. According to him, there would be more difficulties during the implementation of IQA if the persons in charge of the development of IQA system have no expertise in QA. He added that "DNU is lucky to have contemporary QAC's Manager as he has expertise in educational evaluation and attended many training course from abroad". Furthermore, the President highly appreciated the support from international projects in terms of establishing the QAC and training QA staffs. According to him, thanks to the establishment of the QAC, this Center can play a role as a coordinator that can steer QA activities between institutional level and grassroots level. The QAC also plays a role as trainer to transfer QA knowledge to related staffs, thus can involve more people in conducting QA activities. Awareness towards quality, thanks to that, is also increased in DNU.

In addition, the President highly emphasized the issue of financial resources as a factor that influence QA process in the University. As stated by him, accreditation costs a lot of money while a public University like DNU does not have adequate budget for all obliged activities. Therefore, DNU could not afford to

accredit all of the Universities' programs. He also mentioned the cost to invest in to infrastructures and learning facilities for students. He gave an example that investing into laboratory for students to do research may cost the University "billion Vietnam Dong" (currency in Vietnam), and he claimed this as a factor hampering QA process in his University. Further, paying salary for QA staffs who are also the teachers was also included by the President as a hampering factor. According to him, for the limited budget, the University finds it difficult to find enough financial resource to pay for these teachers.

Nevertheless, except for the financial issue, in his opinion, the degree of autonomy that MoET currently has imposed on Universities in general does not cause any troubles for the DNU regarding implementing QA process. He stated that the current policies issued by MoET are rational and appropriate to control Universities in some extent, which can also help MoET keep track of the issue of quality of Universities, especially non-public University. As he argued, if Universities are given more autonomy, educational quality will get worse as non-public Universities, in that case, will just pay attention on how to get more students for their Universities by lower their registration standards regardless of any risks that can affect the issue of quality in the system.

In summary, the result of aforementioned interviews showed that all of responding Universities have fundamental quality assurance structures (QAC) and processes in place and much progress have been made in recent years since the international projects (Profqim & HEP 1) ended; nevertheless, some challenges still remain. While some Universities have implemented some QA activities in the QA process, namely conducting internal audit control or internal program evaluation; other Universities prioritize the accomplishment of institutional self evaluation, showing a degree of confusion existing in these Universities between the nature of IQA and a part of accreditation process, namely the institutional self evaluation. An overview of description of each University in each variable is presented in Annex 1.

4.2 Cross case analysis:

In the following section, the comparison of all Universities, regarding IQA implementation and influential factors, will be presented. The emerging theme will be also described under each variable.

4.2.1 The Quality Assurance Center (QAC): Structure and functions

Data collected through interviews showed that QACs have been formed at most of the Universities as a centralized unit with specialized staffs. There is a variety of QACs' scale, mostly depending on the size of the University and the maturity of the QAC. Bigger Universities (VU, CTU, HSSU and EUH) have big QACs with around 7-15 specialized staffs, and the newly established Universities (HSU, DTU & BDE&TU) have smaller QACs with 2-3 specialized staffs. In terms of organizational features, most of the University has a Vice-Rector or equivalent (for example, University President) to be responsible for QA processes. Most of the Universities, especially the beneficiary Universities of international projects, have established QA satellite network at lower levels in the Universities. (See Table 7)

Table 8 Structure of QACs in

	Universities	Degree of authorities	University supervisor	Fulltime specialized staffs
Beneficiary	Vinh Uni	Have satellite QA officers at unit level	Vice Rector	13
	Can Tho Uni	Have satellite QA officers at unit level	Vice Rector	7
	Da Nang Uni	Have satellite QA teams	University President ²	1
	Thai Nguyen Uni	Have satellite QA teams	University President	4
Non-Beneficiary	Hue University's College of Education	Have satellite QA officers at unit level	Rector	6
	Humanity and Social Sciences Uni	Have satellite QA officers at unit level	Vice Rector	4
	Uni of Economics Ho Chi Minh City	Does not have satellite QA officers	Vice Rector	7
	Duy Tan Uni	Does not have satellite QA officers	Rector	2
	Hoa Sen Uni	Does not have satellite QA officers	Rector	3
	Binh Duong Economics and Technology Uni	Does not have satellite QA officers	Vice Rector	3

Most of QACs have established their functions to support the implementation of QA process in the Universities. At presents, all QACs confirm their coordinating role in assisting University's staff members in the process of conducting institutional self evaluation. Regarding this role, most of the QACs stated that they organized training courses or workshops to help other units within the University understand more about the criteria in MoET's accreditation standards so that they can collect right evidence information as required in the self evaluation reports (Annex 1). Apart from the requirement to coordinate with other units to conduct self evaluation reports, it was revealed in the interviews with QA staffs that the QACs also perform the administrative role as they are required to be responsible for organizing and preparing for the site visits in their Universities, carried out by external evaluation panel.

² University President is the title of the highest ranking officer within the academic administration of a regional University

In addition, data collected from the interviews showed that among 10 Universities, there were 2 beneficiary Universities (CTU & TNU) and 2 non-beneficiary Universities (HSSU & HSU) fulfilling the requirement on performing their interpretative role by developing criteria for internal audit at institutional level based on MoET's accreditation standards. Also, they interpret AUN's standards to help faculties in their Universities carry out internal program evaluation at faculty level (See Annex 1).

With respect to the supportive role, one point worth noting was that QACs tend to provide lower levels with knowledge on institutional accreditation or program accreditation, not the expertise on supporting faculties to develop their own QA processes as expected. For example, whilst CTU and TNU replied that they have regular consultancy on how to conduct program evaluation using AUN's standards for faculties in the Universities; USSH declared that they organized seminar, workshop, and training courses about the conduct of self evaluation report and the conduct of external evaluation for managers, faculties and staff members in HSSU. Another example of this tendency showed through the case of HSE, in which they stated that they support faculties, departments and lectures to develop criteria and measures for the conduct of quality assessment activities. Other QACs did not mention this role as one of their functions with respects to QA activities.

In terms of monitoring role, most of the QACs fulfilled their responsibilities to develop the instruments for self-evaluation and regularly conduct surveys on University's stakeholders, except for BDE&TU. Currently, the evaluation instruments to collect relevant information on different aspects of the activities in BDE&TU are still not available. Further to this role, most of QACs seem fail to meet the requirement for "pointing out the problems" as most of the QACs do not conduct institutional accreditation or equivalent, except CTU, HSSU, HSU and TNU. While CTU, HSSU and HSU carry out institutional accreditation (or internal audit) which was developed based on MoET's standards every 2 years, TNU evaluate QA activities of the University as the whole every 6 months.

However, apart from the responsibilities for QA activities in the University, most of QACs are also responsible for testing (VU, CTU, EUH, HSSU & HUCE) or inspection (HSU, BDE&TU, TNU). Under this kind of organizational structure, one common phenomenon noted was the tendency to consider testing activities or internal inspection as main functions in some QACs. For instance, VU admitted that QA activities is overshadowed by testing activities in their QAC as, according to them, QA activities are costly while testing activities actually can help the Center with financial issue (see case 1). In the similar vein, BDE&TU stated that the main responsibility of their QAC is for internal inspection (see case 5). Also, such Universities tend to prioritize the accomplishment of self evaluation reports which are proclaimed by MoET over the development of IQA activities in their QA processes, either due to the financial constrains (VU) or due to the existence of a degree of confusion between IQA's nature and accreditation. In this regard, when describing IQA activities, the Vice Director/Assistant Manager of QACs in EUH, BDE&TU, & DTU mentioned only activities taken for accreditation. For example, it was shown from the interview that BDE&TU described activities for IQA as collecting evidence for the conduct of self evaluation report and supporting the University to carry out self evaluation process. Similarly, while EUH's QAC described its main functions as carrying out accreditation activities in the University (see case 6), DTU highly emphasized its coordinating role in supporting the self evaluation process of the University as the whole (see case 3). In such Universities, there are no different QA activities namely the program evaluation or internal audit other than the accomplishment of self evaluation reports in their work procedures.

In the contrary, some other Universities like CTU, HSSU & HSU have proved that their QACs were developed and gradually confirmed their position in the Universities. Even though they are also responsible for testing (CTU & HSSU) or inspection (HSU); QA activities are paid more attention in such institutions; and as revealed through the interview, the Vice-Rector of CTU also declared that testing works are not their priority. (See case 2).

4.1.1.1. Observation:

To summarize, observing Table 9, one can see:

- All QACs fulfill the coordinating role, in which QACs coordinate with other units within the University to conduct the process of self evaluation in the University.
- All QACs perform the administrative role to be in charge of organizing and preparing for external evaluation process.
- 8 out of 10 QACs has designed evaluation instruments to collect information from internal stakeholders (students) and external stakeholders (employers); VU only design the tool to conduct survey and collect data from internal stakeholders (students), and BDE&TU has not developed any evaluation instruments.
- 4 QACs, 2 beneficiary Universities and 2 non-beneficiary Universities can perform the interpretive role and get involved in the process of supporting the University to point out the problems by developing and conducting internal audits and program evaluation.

Table 9: QACs' function in 10 Universities

Functions	4 Beneficiary Universities	6 Non-Beneficiary Universities
Supportive role/Provide expertise	None	None
Coordinating role	4	6
Interpretative role	2	2 (1 public, 1 non public)
Monitoring role	Collect information	4
	Point out the problems	2
Administrative role	4	6
Others (Testing or Inspection)	3 out of 4	5 out of 6

4.2.2 QA Process:

For the implementation of QA process, Universities are expected to adopt a tailored-made quality approach that derives from institutional goals and embed from institutional culture to fulfill the internal requirement as external requirement. However, it is not essential that Universities have to adopt a tailored-made approach to manage their quality. It is up to the University to develop an IQA system that fit it best; but at least the system should be built based on the PDCA Deming cycle and should be equipped with 4 basic elements of institutional goal, monitoring instruments, evaluation instrument and improvement of quality.

It was revealed from the interview data that while CTU, DTU, TNU, HUEC &HSSU are adopting an encompassing approach for the management system; VU, HSU, EUH and BDE&TU are not applying any

model for the establishment of IQA system. However, only CTU confirmed that the University is adopting a tailored-made approach, deriving from the institutional strategic goal, to support the development of internal quality assurance system and fulfill MoET's requirement in the accreditation process at the same time. DTU & HSSU stated that ISO model was applied for the purpose of management improvement. According to them, they followed ISO model to arrange and manage their documentary system more effectively. VU, EUH and BDE&TU emphasized the MoET's standards as their quality management guide.

It is noteworthy that most of responding Universities have policies and QA structure in place even though not all of them are operating QA activities systematically.

Missions and goals have been formulated at each University and publically available on their websites (except BDE&TU and some Universities members in DNU). More specifically, while CTU, EUH & HUCE put their mission at the place in the University's campus where it can be noticed easily by their students and staffs, HSE organizes "management retreat" to review University's goals and communicate University's missions with their staff members every five year.

The data collected from the interviews also showed that 3 beneficiary Universities (VU, CTU, TNU) and 3 non-beneficiary Universities (HSSU, EUCE & EUH) have developed their long-term as well as short-term strategic plans. At CTU, the strategic plans are also developed at faculty levels. DTU has its short-term strategic plan; however, there are no clear procedures and measurement showing how the plan is going to be achieved. HSU and BDE&EU admitted that they don't have that kind of strategic documents.

Further to monitoring instruments, as defined, monitoring instruments are required to keep track of University's performance and development in the process of quality assurance; therefore, it is necessary to collect the data on student progress, pass rates and dropout rates, employers' feedback and alumni's feedback. Referring to monitoring instruments developed by responding Universities, most of the Universities reported that the Department of Academic Affairs collected and stored information of students and related activities. However, in the light of interview results, it can be seen monitoring system has not been fully developed to monitor their core activities (teaching and learning activities, for instance). More specifically, while CTU stated that their information system is still under the establishment by the Information and Network Management Center (see case 2), a database to serve management activities is under plan to be established in HSSU and HSU, TNU. In the same line, other Universities admitted that they still stored information manually. It seems HSU, CTU, TNU & HSSU started to be aware of the importance of this monitoring system and the benefit it can bring in the process of assuring quality (which means information can be stored digitally and systematically). This may prove the fact that Universities still lack an effective information collection and management system as a service for quality assessment and improvement.

At faculty level, not many Universities monitor their educational programs systematically. Only TNU and CTU conducted the program evaluation regularly and on the large scale. HSSU has piloted on 5 programs. However, in this respect, they met many difficulties in involving staff members and assisting them to conduct internal program self evaluation based on AUN's standards. As reported, AUN's standards were seen as too high and difficult for the faculty to apply in their program evaluation (see case 8). The rest of the responding Universities are not evaluating their programs regularly.

In the primary process at faculty level, little has been described in terms of QA with regards to designing curriculum, monitoring curriculum, and evaluation of the curriculum in most of the faculties. It is believed that one of the key principles in developing quality assurance processes is the participation of stakeholders; therefore an important element of IQA system is to collect the feedback from stakeholders, especially from labor market and alumni. However, the summary of institutional self evaluation reports (see Annex 2) revealed that most of the Universities seemed not to pay much attention on the use of stakeholders' feedback as basic input for the review of their curriculum or training programs. Additionally, even though the program design is well controlled by the involvement of academic

committee and teachers at faculty level and seriously corresponds with the Universities' strategies as defined by the institutional leadership, this process does not involve much the participation of employers and students, which is considered as one of vital elements to secure the relevance and currency of curriculum.

Regarding evaluation instruments, questionnaires for survey on teachers, new student, alumni, and employers are in place in most of the Universities. Particularly, VU and BDE&TU carry out the survey on students' satisfaction. Some QACs in some universities (DTU & EUH) cooperate with other related units to collect data on the feedback of students and alumni. Some Universities admitted that they actually do not carry out the surveys on employers regularly, for example EUH or VU and USSH.

Most of Universities inform the result of feedback to teachers or related units. Specifically, in most cases, as replied by most of the Universities, the summary of feedback results will be submitted to the Board, faculties will receive the full feedback results, and teachers will be provided with the results of feedback confidentially, but only in the case that teachers receive lots of negative comments from students on their teaching performance. However, many Universities further emphasized that the results of feedback are not followed up. Even though most of Universities conduct surveys, they did not show that the data collected from these surveys are analyzed and used for improvement plans. The overview of QA processes in 10 Universities is presented in Table 10.

Table 10 Overview of QA processes in 10 Universities

QA processes		4 Beneficiary Universities	6 Non-Beneficiary Universities
QA approach		1	None
Institutional goals/aim		3	5
Monitoring instruments		None	None
Evaluation instrument	Self evaluation	4	6
	Internal audit	2	2
	Program evaluation	3	1
	Curriculum evaluation	None	None
	Student evaluation	4	6
Quality improvement		None	None

4.2.2.1 Observation:

As it can be seen in Table 10, there are some similarities among 10 Universities: monitoring system is not developed; curriculum evaluation is not paid much attention, and activities aimed at quality improvement are not carried out.

Another theme emerging from this Table 10 is that self evaluation process is conducted at all 10 Universities. This seems to reflect a general trend in Vietnamese Universities to strive to adapt to the rising accreditation trend. However, as it was said before, internal quality assurance is not one-time activities for accreditation. Even in the absence of accreditation, there should be activities that can help to regularly review the strengths and weakness of the University as the whole, which are called internal audit. Referring to this point, among 10 Universities, there are 2 beneficiary Universities of international projects and 2 non-beneficiary Universities conducting this activity of internal audit. Beside internal audit,

3 out of these 4 Universities also conduct program evaluation. This fact seems to show a line of distinction in implementing QA process among these 10 Universities. While 6 Universities only pay attention to the self evaluation process for the purpose of accreditation, the other 4 Universities appear to have more QA activities in place. Additionally, crossing checking the findings on QAC's functions (Table 8), it showed that these 4 QACs perform a more active role in QA works than the other 6 Universities. For this point, it can be referred that while QA activities are quite implicit in 6 Universities, the other 4 Universities seem to have more explicit activities. In this aspect, 10 Universities can be divided into 2 groups: Group 1 is the Universities with explicit QA activities and Group 2 is the Universities with implicit QA activities, as in Table 10. Explicit QA activities, in this sense, refer to the activities that a University does in a regular and systematic manner to assure the quality of its provision even in the absence of accreditation.

Table 11 The distinction in implementing IQA among 10 Universities

Group 1: Explicit QA activities		Group 2: Implicit QA activities	
Beneficiary Uni: CTU, TNU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QACs perform an active role in coordinating, monitoring, interpreting, and administrating QA works - Conduct self evaluation for accreditation, internal audit and program evaluation. 	Beneficiary Uni: VU, DNU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QACs mainly perform the role in coordinating and administrating QA works for accreditation - Conduct self evaluation for accreditation
Non-Beneficiary Uni: HSSU, HSU		Non-Beneficiary Uni: HUEC, UEH, DTU, BDE&TU	

4.2.3 Influential factors:

Devolution of responsibility & degree of centralization: All of the responding Universities affirmed that there is a clear devolution of responsibility in their Universities. In terms of organizational feature, Dean will be the one who are mainly responsible for the quality of his faculty, and this responsibility will be devolved to Head of Subject at lower level. Head of Subject then have to report every operational activities happening in his/her program to the Deans. Deans, in this situation, just play a role of initial steer at his/her faculty.

According to the interviewed Rectors, Deans are also given much authority in making decision in some extent for their faculties, for example recruitment process, the proposal of curriculum or their own way of management. With this way of giving responsibilities and authorities, it is assumed that the quality structure at most of the responding Universities is organized in a decentralized way.

Resources: With regards to the financial resources, all of the Universities in Group 2 and 1 University in Group 1 (TNU) said that funding is very important to the implementation of IQA. According to these Universities, accreditation is costly, and time and human resources consuming (as they mistaken accreditation as IQA). Accreditation process requires a considerable time for the conduct of self evaluation report, for example administrative time for data collection and site visit preparation. It also costs a substantial amount of money to pay for teachers, who also involve in the evaluation process. Additionally, human resource in terms of QA capacity is also needed to collect information and analyze data in the self evaluation reports. In addition to the funding for accreditation, some Universities in Group 2 highlighted the importance of adequate funding to invest into the development of University's infrastructures or educational facilities in the process of implementing IQA. In the point of view of these

Universities, they need to have good conditions in place in order to assure institutional quality. (see case 8 and 10)

In the meanwhile, only CTU and HSU in Group 1 do not consider it as a factor that can hamper the development IQA system in their Universities. The Vice-Rector of CTU stated that “quality can be improved even in the condition of the lack of funding because QA is a continuous process and whether QA is implemented effectively or not depends on the establishment of procedures relating to QA activities”. In the similar vein, the Rector of HSU also claimed that quality can be achieved in a limited budget, as that Rector said “the financial difficulty derives from the ineffective management of finance. If the University manages its budget well, then it can manage the issue of quality.”

In respects to human resources, it is important to recall that staff development was taken under consideration for the essential of investing into staffs so that IQA can be perceived as beneficial by staff members in the Universities. From the results provided by the interviews in this study, it was shown that even though the issue of staff development is taken seriously and teaching staffs are always encouraged and financially supported to upgrade their qualification by most of the Universities, it was revealed that Universities still have not taken in account of how to implement these staff development schemes in an integrated way with QA works.

Leadership: Most of institution remarked the crucial role of leadership in demonstrating commitment to quality. All Universities have a vice rector (or equivalent) in charge of quality assurance. It is obvious that the initial steer came from the top but the continuous involvement of leadership varied from almost total to some degree of engagement regarding to QA works among responding Universities. This creates the differences in the IQA implementation among the Universities. For example, the involvement of the leader in CTU of Group 1 is much more compared to the rest of the Universities. (see Case 2). As a result, it can be seen that QA activities is more explicit in CTU. In the Universities of Group 2, where the senior leaders and QAC’s leaders do not involve much in QA works, there are not many quality-oriented activities happening in their QA processes.

Staffs’ expertise and degree of training: If the operation of QAC was examined closely with the factor of staffs’ expertise, the correlation between the effective operation of QAC and staffs’ expertise will be revealed. The explicit QA processes occur in the QACs of Group 1 where they have good human resources in QA. Particularly, the Vice-Rector who is in charge of the issue of quality in CTU has been trained abroad for many times, and now he is one of the leading experts in QA in Vietnam; additionally, the QAC’s Vice Director in CTU has been also trained in the international project, and he is as well very good in QA. Therefore, it is not surprising when the CTU’s QAC has become a supporting Center regarding to QA works for other Universities in the region. HSSU is another example illustrating the correlation between expertise and the effective operation of QAC. The Director of QAC in HSSU is an external evaluation expert, who reviews the institutional self-evaluation of other Universities when they would like to be accredited. Her knowledge and experience as an external assessor really help the HSSU’s QAC operate very well as compared to other Universities in Vietnam.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the expertise in QA really plays an important role and has an impact on the IQA implementation in the University.

Regarding to the degree of training by international projects, the 2 beneficiary Universities in Group 1 have explicit QA process (CTU & TNU see Table 11) as compared to most of the non-beneficiary Universities in Group 2. With the help from international experts, these two QACs can conduct more QA works, for example, conducting surveys to evaluate educational program or even to assess the core activities of the University as a whole through internal audit. Apart from that point, with the support of these international projects, QA training are more likely to happen in those that participated in the international projects, especially in CTU & TNU. Therefore, a QA network was developed within each of 4 beneficiary Universities (see Table 7). To some extent, it can be seen that CTU and TNU has benefited from their participation in the international projects. However, it is crucial to note that QA processes are

not actually explicit in other 2 beneficiary Universities (VU & DNU). VU & DNU do not develop more QA works except the self evaluation process.

Degree of autonomy: In terms of the degree of autonomy, none of the University found it as a factor to hamper the IQA implementation. All of the Universities, especially the public ones, assure that all of the policies on the autonomy of entrance exams, funding or curriculum are totally reasonable to manage the Universities and to control the unqualified Universities.

Oblige policy: As regards the oblige policy on the establishment of QAC, all of the Universities confirmed that this is a good practice for them to start with establishment of IQA and concern more about IQA. Accordingly, most of the Universities established the center for quality assurance. However, according to these Universities, in order to promote the IQA implementation, MoET needs to impose some stricter regulation on accreditation on the Universities. As stated by CTU, the reason why some Universities ignore the system of IQA is that there are actually no difference between the accredited Universities and non-accredited Universities; and additionally, there are also no clear consequences for unqualified Universities.

4.2.3.1 **Observations:** there are 2 key observations in this section:

Degree of ownership: In the view of organizational structure (devolution of responsibilities and degree of decentralization), the distinction in implementing IQA between 2 Groups was explored to be due to the degree of ownership for quality assurance process among the Universities rather than the degree of decentralization.

When QA activities at faculty level were discuss with Deans at some Universities, the representative Dean in CTU was the only one who planned to have a QA team especially responsible for QA works at his faculty. He also affirmed that this decision derived from his awareness towards the important role of IQA for his faculty. In the same vein, the Director of QAC in HSU expressed her efforts for confirming the position of quality center and developing quality culture in HSU. As she said, “the unclear status for accreditation results in the fact that QAC’s role is not well recognized in the University. Therefore, I would like to develop a website where all of QA information will be publically available to all HSU’s stakeholders. However, it took me a lot of time to explain to the Marketing Manager the importance of and benefit may get from this website”. Likewise, in the case of CTU and HSSU, the QACs have been conducting many QA activities, for example the internal audit using MoET’s standards, program evaluation using AUN’s standards or the development of quality assurance handbook, protocols, or direct QA consultants to the related units within the University. More importantly, when asked to describe the approach to internal quality assurance arrangements, these leaders highly emphasized the QA’s purposes and the spirit behind them. These attitudes seemed to be resulted from some leaders’ ownership of the internal quality assurance process within some Universities.

A contrasting case is illustrated by VU and DNU, the VU’s QAC used to conduct internal audit on the faculties after the training by Profqim project; however, this activity was not sustainable. The VU and DNU also do not conduct any other QA activities, except the assistance on the self evaluation process for the whole University. In some other Universities, BDE&TU for example, seemed to see quality assurance activities as a burden and they do not feel ownership of this concept in their Universities.

Apparently, the degree of ownership for QA process in the Universities in Group 1 is more obvious than the Universities in Group 2. It was revealed that the factor here is not so much with the extent to which the University is decentralized but rather whether managers in the University feel ownership of the quality assurance process and feel attached from it in their everyday activities.

Manager’s perspectives on IQA, regarding financial resource and staff development:

Regarding to financial resource, the two opposite opinion on the issue of financial resources (see **Resources** in this section) emerged the situation that there are differences between 2 Groups of Universities in terms of their understanding toward QA. While all Universities in Group 2 focus on the

costliness of accreditation process and found the scarcity in finance as the hampering factor for them to implement IQA, most of the Universities in Group 1, where their QA processes are more explicit do not see the issue of finance as a cause for not implementing a good system of IQA. This situation confirm the fact the most of the Universities in Group 2 interpret the implementation of IQA as the preparation of self evaluation reports for accreditation. In addition to that, some Universities in Group 2 also emphasized the inadequate funding for the investment of Universities' infrastructure or facilities as constrain to develop IQA system. This approach adopted by such Universities has an impact on how the condition on financial resources is perceived. It seems while the Universities in Group 2 considered the adequate funding as prerequisite for QA processes, Universities in Group 1 considered funding as a condition to facilitate the process of implementing QA works.

Therefore, manager's perspective on QA (or correct interpretation of QA) turns out to be important to the implementation of holistic institutional QA system. Indeed, to some extent, the data collected from the interviews confirmed that the more explicit internal QA arrangements are those that derive from the Universities whose managers have better understanding about QA. CTU is a typical example. The fact that the Vice Rector of CTU is very knowledgeable about QA has resulted in CTU's attention to internal quality process, conscious planning and reviewing academic goals. In this aspect, the factor of QA perspective has more impact on IQA implementation than the elements of financial resources.

With respect to staff development arrangement, the emerging theme shown through the aspect of staff development in the Universities indicates that Universities have not implement staff development schemes in an integrated way with QA works, which results in the situation that teachers do not feel enthusiastic about QA works (see case 4, 5, and 8). When discussed QA activities at faculty level, most of the Universities complained that their teaching staffs did not appreciate QA works, and some even considered it as a burden. This is in line with the study of EUA (2002-2003). It was claimed that quality assurance arrangements which often include internal audit, institutional self evaluation or the conduct of teacher evaluation are likely to be perceived by teachers as threat to their career development or as appraisal process, but not an opportunity for them to improve their performance, leading to the ineffectiveness of IQA processes. In fact, the interview results showed that most of the Universities whose perspectives on quality assurance arrangement focus more on input rather than process and output resulted in the implicit link between the policies on staff development arrangements and IQA arrangements. For this fact, the awareness of teachers toward the role of QA in Universities was mentioned by some Universities as one of the hindering factors for IQA implementation. This actually results from Universities' perspectives toward staff development schemes for promoting IQA implementation.

In short, the observation from the Universities' views of financial resource and staff development schemes toward the development of IQA system reveal that the perspectives toward QA have an impact on the approach the Universities adopt to implement the system of IQA.

In conclusion, beside these two aforementioned factors (the degree of ownership and the perspectives on QA), in the light of the interviews, it was also shown that, staff's expertise in QA (QA knowledge), degree of training in QA, and the lack of explicit accreditation's consequences, are considered as the factors that may support or hamper the Universities to implement IQA for their continuous improvement as well as internal and external accountability. It was also revealed that within higher education institution in Vietnam, the use of accreditation, self evaluation, program evaluation and internal audits are some common forms of quality assurance processes. Apart from that, evidence from the interview results analyzed in this section also answered the questions whether there are explicit differences in implementing these aforementioned QA processes among Universities and whether the international projects could improve QA status in Vietnam's higher education since the end of their supports. Those questions, which are also the research questions of this study, will be thoroughly discussed in the following section.

Chapter 5:

5. Conclusions, Recommendation and Discussion

This chapter highlights conclusions and discusses the salient findings of this study. It also gives recommendation in relation to the results to improve the implementation of IQA system in Vietnam's Universities.

5.1 Conclusions:

To provide an answer for the extent to which the international projects influence IQA implementation in Vietnam's higher education in this present study, the two secondary questions were addressed prior to the primary question.

Research question 1:

Are there any differences in IQA implementation Vietnam's Universities, regarding to the support from international projects?

The result of this study showed that quality assurance systems of 10 responding Universities are largely in place. Most of the Universities have QA staffs at other relevant organizational levels, such as faculties and or departments.

Additionally, the findings under this study also show a distinction line between 2 groups of Universities in terms of implementing explicit QA activities. As mentioned above, explicit QA activities refer to the activities that a University does in a regular and systematic manner to assure the quality of its provision even in the absence of accreditation, for example, the conduct of internal audit at institutional level and program evaluation at faculty level.

Nevertheless, one important finding from this study worth noting is that even though there is a distinction between group of the Universities with explicit QA activities and group of the Universities with implicit QA activities, there are not many differences with regards to QA processes. In other words, in terms of the implementation of IQA within higher education institution, there are at least 3 things in common among Vietnam's Universities as follows:

- Adequate QA structure, but still implicit QA process:

The results of this study showed that most of the responding Universities have fundamental QACs in place. All QACs have their functions and working procedures. Most of them confirm their role in coordinating other units within the Universities to conduct self evaluation while some of them gradually fulfill the role of monitoring QA activities in their Universities.

Nevertheless, QA processes are still not explicit in the Universities. Most of the Universities have formulated their missions; however not many of them have applied a clear model of quality assurance mechanism to provide a holistic view with respect to the goals and missions that they are pursuing. Monitoring systems are not well developed at all responding Universities. Particularly, most of the Universities still manage information manually, which may result in the ineffective way of monitoring internal operational activities.

At the primary process, Universities have not been described in terms of QA with regards to design curriculum, monitoring curriculum, and evaluation of the curriculum. Therefore, it can be concluded from the findings that Universities have still not developed explicit QA processes even though they have QA organizational structures in place.

- **Considering the conduct of self evaluation reports as IQA implementation:**

In the light of interview results, the findings revealed that in some QACs the role of QA tasks is overshadowed by other tasks, for example testing or inspection. In addition to that fact, the confusion between IQA's nature and accreditation has led the Universities to focus only on carrying out self evaluation reports at institutional level. Also, there is a tendency that Universities consider the conduct of self evaluation as the implementation of IQA. Evidently, most of the Universities do not have other QA activities except the preparation for accreditation processes.

Nevertheless, to some extent, the self evaluation requirements from MoET can generate a level of QA activities in the Universities, such as Universities' recognition of the need for the conduct of feedback or the value of assessing Universities' activities more regularly. In this regards, the findings indicated that accreditation processes can actually promote the implementation of QA in the Universities. However, since the accreditation processes have still not been implemented well at system level, in other words the clear consequence of accreditation has not yet been available, Universities are not motivated to implement an explicit IQA processes, and instead they just focus on the conduct of self evaluation.

- **Feedback system as IQA implementation:**

Another emerging theme from the findings under this study is that besides self evaluation, it appears that the development of evaluation instrument (Table 9) was paid much attention by almost every University. Most of the Universities have developed questionnaires for University's stakeholders, for example survey on new students, alumni, and employers. However, the interview results in this study also showed that students are not informed the results of how their feedbacks are used in teachers' assessments. This lack of transparency can lead to the possibility that students will not be interested in giving the Universities valuable feedback information. Additionally, many Universities further emphasized that the results of feedback are not used effectively for the improvement of educational programs or curricula. Therefore, it can be concluded that even though Universities consider the development of feedback system as the implementation of IQA, the objectives of closing the feedback loops in the process of assuring quality, which means requiring faculties or other related units to act upon the outcomes of QA results has not yet been fulfilled.

In conclusion, even though the supports from international project has been appreciated and have had valuable impact on the establishment of quality assurance structures in Vietnam's higher education, most interviewees in this study emphasized that the development of IQA process is still in its infancy in most of the Universities. Even the beneficiary Universities cannot show the explicit management activities that link to QA process in the Universities for example: clearly defining their strategic goals; defining the ways to achieve them; analyzing carefully what kind of information they need to monitor their performance; or pay attention to the involvement of internal stakeholders in the follow-up procedures to sustain their commitment and motivation.

Therefore, it can be referred from this finding that international projects can make a difference on the operational activities taken place at some QACs of beneficiary Universities; however, there are not many differences with regard to QA processes among the Universities.

Research question 2: Which factors influence the IQA implementation among Vietnam's Universities?

It can be inferred from the interview results that leadership is considered as a crucial role in demonstrating commitment to quality. All ten Universities have a Vice Rector (or equivalent) to be responsible for quality assurance. Several Universities stressed that the responsibilities were devolved to possible lower levels and that initial steer came from the top managers. However, the findings showed that the explicit quality assurance mechanism was reported to be more developed in the Universities, where leadership can

encourage staff members to have a degree of ownership toward QA processes and feel attached with it in their daily activities. This approach emphasizes the importance of the balance between centralized and decentralized approach. In this regards, leadership is expected to play an essential role in the development of Universities' quality assurance process by giving initial steer and a broad degree of ownership in quality assurance mechanism.

The second factor that this present study found out to support the implementation of IQA in the Universities is staff's expertise in QA. In the light of results collected the interviews, it is clear that the more explicit QA activities derive from the QACs that have QA staffs with expertise in QA. Playing a mediator role between top managers and grassroots, it is essential for QA staffs to have expertise in QA in order to ensure a shared understanding of QA purpose within the institution. It was also revealed from this the study that knowledge about QA also ensures that QA staffs will not consider QA works as a burden (see BDE&TU), but will feel like an integral part of academic community and have more ownership of quality assurance process in the institution (see CTU). Furthermore, it also was found from this study that knowledge about QA (expertise in QA) is also important to University's managers. In fact, as implied from interview results, accurate view on definitions and purposes of quality assurance process help senior leadership take the better lead in developing, monitoring or facilitating the process.

Degree of training about QA is the third factor that this present study found to have influence on IQA implementation in the Universities. Apparently, QA training is essential to QA staffs, and those beneficiary Universities have this advantage over others when they were trained about QA and were ensured that those trained people can provide training to their colleagues. However, not all of these Universities can really make a difference, regarding to the implementation of IQA, from the ones that did not participate in the international projects. In fact, 2 out of 4 beneficiary Universities whose QA staff members have really made big effort on developing QACs can have explicit QA activities in place in their institutions. Therefore, it can be concluded that while investing in people through QA training is obviously necessary to avoid quality assurance activities becoming a burden; the finding from this present study also indicated the need for QA staffs' commitment to the development of QACs.

Further, the fourth influential factor revealed in this study is the stimulation from accreditation activities. At first, it was assumed in this study that the top down system of IQA in Vietnam, which is implied in the oblige policy imposed on the large number of institutions to establish the quality assurance centers, may just result in the extrinsic motivation of institutions to implement IQA system, and thus lead to the ineffective implementation of quality assurance at institutional level. However, the interview results of this study presented an opposed finding. Recognizing the importance of QA, the request from MoET that all institutions set up QACs to be in charge of conducting regular user survey and self-evaluation processes was welcomed by most of the Universities in Vietnam. The interviews showed that Universities expressed a high level of their enthusiasm to conduct the self evaluation and participate in the external accreditation processes. Therefore, in the light of the interview analysis, the finding indicated that a clear mechanism for higher education accreditation is a factor that can influence the IQA implementation in the current context of Vietnamese higher education system. A strong and transparent statement of accreditation is considered as guidance for the Universities know what to expect from the accreditation process and act upon. Another finding also worth noting in this study is that most of the Universities mentioned the need to create a competition environment among higher education institutions through accreditation to address the quality issues in Vietnam effectively. It can be referred from the interviews that this approach could potentially lead to the situation, in which students would have more information in the sense of quality for their choice of university. Generally, the finding in this study showed that, accreditation without transparent consequences results in the implicit IQA activities in the Vietnam's Universities or even can hamper Universities to have an effective implementation of IQA.

Last but not least, in the light of the finding, it is interesting to find out that Universities appear to perceive quality assurance as the assurance on the input of an education system (see 4.2.3.1) with little attention paid to process, outputs and outcomes. Input, in this sense, involves all resources which include people,

facilities, technology and funding needed for the entire process of education. This perspective on quality assurance actually misguides the Universities to seek for the fulfillment of pre-conditions for quality, instead of focusing on the process of how to achieve the required quality based on Universities' current conditions. Consequently, Universities' wrong perception on quality assurance (desires to have good inputs in place) is partly a reason for their ignorance on the serious QA process to conduct self evaluation for the sake of their self improvement. In sum, it can be referred from those findings that whilst the lack of funding for QA-related activities apparently hinders University to effectively implement IQA as it is proved to be costly; Universities' perception on finding funds to ensure quality through educational inputs is a factor which also potentially have an influence on Universities' approach to the development of IQA system.

In conclusion, the factors that can promote an effective implementation of IQA revealed in this study are:

- Commitment of leadership to quality and the implementation of quality assurance process with the balance of between centralized (initial steer) and decentralized approach (encourage a broad degree of ownership)
- Knowledge of QA is widely shared in the Universities
- Effective accreditation process with well define standards, comprehensive statement as to the main purpose of accreditation and the possible consequences
- Clear perspectives about QA

Primary research questions:

To what extent the international projects influence the IQA implementation in Vietnam?

As mentioned before, quality assurance was introduced into Vietnam with the participation of international experts from international projects. In addition to the support for the establishment of QACs- setting up the first building block for IQA system to be formulated, these international projects provided the training programs about QA for the beneficiary Universities.

The finding from this study indicated that these training activities for a group of beneficiary Universities have created core people with knowledge about QA to support QA activities in their Universities. It was shown in the interviews that people who have undergone these training have been playing a role in transferring quality assurance methodology and quality assurance practices in self evaluation to their colleagues in their Universities and colleagues from other Universities as well (CTU). Additionally, such beneficiary Universities also recognized the importance of assessing their own operational activities more thoroughly, started to highlight the need for collecting and analyzing data more systematically, and more importantly, the Universities have learned to conduct user survey more regularly (CTU, TNU).

It can be referred from the findings that the support on the establishment and functioning of QACs from Profqim, the training on external evaluation exercises from HEP1 and Profqim as well as many training workshops about QA held by HEP2 have direct impact on the development of organizational structure to support the implementation of IQA in the higher education institutions of Vietnam. The interview results showed that much progress has been made in terms of QA organizational structures. All Universities are now required to conduct self evaluation processes; and in order to support these internal processes, Universities have established QACs. It is expected that these QACs are responsible for preparing the self evaluation reports and conducting regular surveys on stakeholders. However, in terms of actual QA processes in institutional level, not much progress has been actually made and many challenges have still remained. As shown in the interview findings, the initiatives for IQA implementation in the Universities were derived from international good practices. However, the interviews also showed that QA activities in the Universities tend to die down after these projects, not because they lack of concern but because they have other priority or simply they lack of funds (as mentioned by them) to continue their internal quality

assurance works (see VU, DNU). Evidently, it can be seen that most of Vietnam's Universities have still lacked monitoring system for managing information and serving as a tool for quality assessment and quality improvement. And additionally, even though there are surveys conducted; results of feedback are not used for quality improvement. Especially, in the light of this study's results, it appeared that not many Vietnam's Universities could involve well the participation of external stakeholders in their processes of assuring quality. Particularly, the employers are not involved in the design of curriculum and the evaluation of curriculum.

In conclusion, this present study revealed that over the last decade, with the supports in capacity building in QA through a series of training workshop, international projects has created prerequisites for the consolidation of the quality assurance system in Vietnam's higher education; however, the quality assurance processes among Universities are still in infancy and the Universities are still in learning process to implement their IQA system effectively.

5.2 Discussion:

The findings regarding first research question, which indicated that there are not many differences in terms of QA processes implemented among Vietnam's Universities and that the implementation of QA processes may be encouraged by accreditation processes, are in line with previous research. In this regards, Mishra (2006) stated that to capitalize on and add credibility to the internal quality assurance, accreditation as external quality monitoring is preferred by most of the countries in the world. Similarly, in the study of Hanft and Kohler (2008), it was stated that while Universities take increasing responsibilities for their quality, external quality assurance is expected to support the Universities in their efforts as Universities require support and time to develop their system of quality assurance gradually and according to their own needs. This research adds to these findings as to prove that for the promotion of IQA implementation, the processes of external quality assurance may need to be in place beforehand. However, there is an oppose argumentation that if accreditation is paid much attention, quality will be perceived as a burden due to the accountability that may dominate in national external quality assurance procedures (Harvey, 2008). This creates the dilemma of quality assurance in higher education. Further research therefore should be on this aspect in order to fortify the generalization on the relationship between internal quality assurance and accreditation.

The findings with regards to second research questions suggested some influential factors to the implementation of IQA in the Universities, including leadership, staff's expertise in QA, degree of QA training, accreditation processes and perception on QA, are confirmed by the study of , EUA (2006) and Sursock (2011). Those findings on influential factors can have an implication to the studies regarding how to promote the effectiveness of QA system in the Universities. Those findings are also useful to VIUPA (external client of this study as mentioned in Chapter 1) as a reference document when making QA training curriculum to support non-public Universities in developing their own IQA system. For example, instead of providing QA training courses for only QA staffs, they can also extend the training to Universities' leaders in order to make QA activities sustainable.

Furthermore, findings regarding the primary research question indicated that QA activities tend to wane out after international projects terminated and not much progress has made in terms of QA processes. It is apparent that international projects play a role as an advisor and Vietnam needs to take ownership of its strategy and policy. There might be a question that whether the international experiences that are successfully applied in other countries can also be effective in the context of Vietnam. In this regards, for the upcoming projects, Vietnamese experts should take responsibilities for researching on strategies or models that are more suitable with Vietnamese context based on the expertise brought by international experts, not just passively follow their experiences. There should also be a research to evaluate the

effectiveness and sustainability of these adopted strategies or models in order to see whether or not the Vietnam's higher education system is moving in the right direction.

Regarding research methodology, this study employed case-study research method. Accordingly, interview was mainly utilized to collect the data. Moreover, self evaluation reports conducted by Universities for the process of accreditation were also used to further investigate the quality assurance at primary process of teaching and learning in the Universities. Data was analyzed through within case analysis, in which a close look was taken on each University, and through cross case analysis, in which the results of each University were compared and contrasted.

There are some words for methodologies considerations for the readers in this study. First of all, it is important to note that the study seek to answer the research questions through a qualitative methodology. There could be a suggestion that such analysis (influence of international projects on Vietnamese Universities' IQA implementation) can be best studied in quasi-experimental research, as such kind of design is best suited to spot the differences with quantitative data before and after the Universities participated in the international projects. However, it should be taken into account that the notion of quality assurance was just newly introduced into Vietnam; accordingly the IQA implementation in Vietnam's Universities has not been placed in the optimal condition where everything needed is already in place in order to be evaluated according to standards. In that case the survey questionnaires may just give a partial view of the reality. Through the interviews, a more detailed view on the University's quality processes in the context of Vietnam's quality assurance can be gained. Nevertheless, the disadvantage of only relying on interview method is that while some detailed view can be gained, some political responses can also be provided by respondents, especially for the more or less politic-related questions (for example, the question about degree of autonomy), which may have a negative impact on the effectiveness of data collection. In this case, a potentially good research method may be the posttest only control group design, in which quantitative and qualitative data can be used to triangulate the findings.

5.3 Recommendation:

Regarding how to promote the IQA implementation in the Universities, a few recommendations can be made. The recommendation of this study is based on the current QA system and procedures in Vietnam and focuses on the gaps that have been identified through the analysis of this study. As it can be seen, Universities are paying much attention on the conduct of evaluation reports. However, whether this process of preparing the self evaluation reports for accreditation can bring any impact on University's quality improvement is still ambiguous. Based on that fact, this present study recommends the further studies that can point out the intended effects and unintended effects of the conduct of self evaluation on the quality improvement in Vietnam's Universities.

Besides, there are recommendations for the system level and institutional level:

- In system level: it is believed that effective implementation of IQA can be encouraged through a compulsory system of accreditation:

- o **Transparent consequences for accreditation**

In order to increase the credibility and reliability of the QA system, there should be transparency about the consequences of the quality assurance system, and Universities' quality status should be publically available. However, it should be taken into account that in the context of Vietnam's higher education where Universities are still not open enough to share the information about their strengths and weaknesses to society, there would be a pressure for them to publish the full report of accreditation outcomes including their level of quality. Therefore, it is recommended that there should be only the summary of the main findings of Universities' accreditation outcomes available to the public.

- o **Independent QA agencies**

The present study showed that even though the quality assurance activities have been progressing, QA activities at institutional level have not been sustained. This is partly due to the lack of a permanent organizational structure to keep track of the Universities' operational implementation of the accreditation activities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to establish independent quality assurance agencies to be responsible for ensuring that the quality assurance activities, promulgated in the relevant legislation are conducted at the institutional level. Additionally, it is important to note that for ensuring the successful implementation QA agencies at national level, there should be enough trained resources beforehand. Therefore, formal training is seriously required for QA agencies' staffs. However, the challenge remained is how to develop this pool of QA human resources at an affordable and sustainable manner. For this challenge, at first hand the concept of training the trainers can be adopted, and later on QA training should be a continuous process, which can be obtained through conference, workshop and seminars on QA.

- At institutional level: there are two aspects at this level

o **Training Universities to embed self evaluation process within institutions**

Similar to the implementation of accreditation procedures at system level, the implementation of an effective quality assurance system also requires Universities to well prepare for the trained human resources. Currently, the quality assurance arrangement in Vietnam mainly focus on self evaluation but this activity is not combined with University's management activities; future efforts on therefore would also focus on training the Universities to embed self evaluation process into the institutional management activities for the purpose of continuously improving the quality of Universities' performance. It would also recommendable that the training should focus more on data management and how to use data as relevant evidence for the internal improvement as well as external evaluation process, for example establishing information system on quality of the University or setting a database serving quality assurance activities .

o **Forcing Universities to set up quality assurance processes**

Like the oblige requirement of establishing QAC in Universities, it could be recommendable that Universities should also be forced to establish their own institutional quality assurance system if they would like to be accredited. With this approach, there could be the possibility that the system would be established in the Universities just for the sake of satisfying MoET's requirement and accordingly there would be no guarantee for its effectiveness. However, with this approach, the Universities at least will be forced to pay more attention to the implementation of IQA. Particularly, it can be advisable that Universities should be encouraged to show up on their QAC's websites the information relating to the quality assurance approach that they are adopting, or the QA activities that they are carrying out. Besides, if this effort were made, MoET can easily keep track of the Universities' QA activities and performance. In return, Universities will be more responsible for their quality. In this case, Universities thus should get adequate prerequisites, for example trained resources on quality management, before that MoET's requirement is officially imposed on the Universities.

ANNEX 1: Overview of the University

Table 12 Overview of description of each University: The Assurance Quality Center (QAC)

University	Degree of authorities	Functions
VU	Have satellite QA officer at units level	Focus more on testing
CTU	Have satellite QA officer at lower levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Consult the Board on QA activities * Establish QA system * Conduct institutional self-evaluation * Conduct program evaluation * Establish feedback system * Support neighbor Universities regarding to QA activities * Regularly consult lower levels in terms of QA activities * Protocols, QA strategic plans and QA reports are publically available on CTU's website and well communicated to relevant lower level
DTU	Does not have satellite QA officer at units level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Consult the Board about the activities of QA * Support the self-evaluation process of the University * Organizing training courses to train academic staffs on how to collect evidence for self-evaluation report and how to write the self-evaluation report
HSE	Does not have satellite QA officer at units level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Establishing programs and plans for assessing the quality of training * Organizing activities for quality assurance * Developing information and database system for quality assurance * Coordinating with other units and faculty to conduct quality assessment activities * Support faculties, departments and lecturers to develop criteria and measurement to conduct quality assessment activities.

University	Degree of authorities	Functions
USSH	Have satellite QA officer at lower levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Developing all regulation and guiding document for all IQA activities in the University * Instructing, consulting, monitoring and supervising the implementation of QA activities in all units of the University * Organizing and monitoring the progress and results of the instructional self-evaluation activities in the University according to MoET's Accreditation Standards * Organizing and monitoring the progress and results of the program self-evaluation according to AUN's Standards; as well as conducting internal audit for the University as the whole * Researching and developing the instruments for self-evaluation (questionnaires, surveys...) * Organizing seminar, workshop, training courses regarding to QA activities, institutional self-evaluation and external evaluation for managers, faculty and staffs * Developing quality culture
EUH	Does not have satellite QA officer at units level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Researching and developing the total solutions for assuring institutional quality, developing programs, teaching methods and assessment methods; * Cooperating with other units to develop the evaluation instruments to collect relevant data on educational programs, teachers, students, alumni; Conducting self-evaluation for accreditation; * Organizing some workshops to help other units within the University understand more about the criteria in the Accreditation standards, how to collect evidence and how to write the self-evaluation; * Consulting and following up the accreditation activities in other units of the University.
BDE&TU	Does not have satellite QA officer at units level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Consult the University's Board about the activities of Inspection and QA in accordance with the requirement of MoET
HUCE	Have satellite QA officer at lower levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Organizing training activities to improve the capacity of academic and non-academic staffs in testing, accreditation and quality assurance * Consulting the Board to implement the activities related to testing, accreditation and quality assurance

University	Degree of authorities	Functions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Cooperating with other Universities to exchange information, experiences, and expertise in QA * Organizing and implementing research activities related to testing, accreditation, and quality assurance at institutional level and above
TNU	Have satellite QA officer at lower levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Assisting the Board to steer and implement policies, MoET's legal documents related to quality assurance activities * Assisting the Board to develop the system of IQA through the establishment of QA network in Universities members * Consulting the Board to establish strategic plans, proposing QA roadmap for TNU, establishing and developing quality culture in TNU * Supporting University members and other training units in TNU to establish accreditation plans based on MoET's accreditation standards * Guiding QA teams in University members to conduct self-evaluation reports. Based on those reports, the Center will make a summary report and submit it to the Board in October of each year * Steering QA teams to establish evaluation procedures * Evaluating QA activities in TNU as a whole (every 6 months) * Planning and organizing training courses about QA for staff members in TNU
DNU	Have satellite QA officer at lower levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Functions of the Center are not explicit described.

Table 13 Overview of description of each University: The Quality Assurance process

University	Mission/goal	Monitoring system	Evaluation instrument	Improvement plan
VU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mission & goal are publically available to students and staffs on the University's website * Have QA strategic plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Not well established monitoring system: information is not used for the effective management of programs and other activities * Have periodically review of annual plan; however, the results are not followed up * At faculty level, there are no clear procedure for the evaluation of curriculum and program contents. Additionally, student assessment are not assured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * There is no program evaluation * The activity of internal audit was not sustainable. * Have institutional self-evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * No clear procedures for improvement plan. * Improvement was not involved stakeholders' opinion
CTU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mission and goal are publically available on the website and in University's campus * Have QA long-term strategic plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Five-yearly cycle strategic plans, one-yearly cycle for implementation plans, and weekly-group -review * Adopt all-encompassing approach to develop it internal quality assurance process * A database is established for the monitoring system; however, it is still under the establishment. * At faculty level, there is no clear procedure for monitoring curriculum * Curriculum was designed not based on students and employers' feedback * No clear procedure for monitoring curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Well developed evaluation instruments: feedback from students, alumni, employers. * Have course evaluation and program evaluation * Internal audit system * Institutional self-evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Evaluation results are not followed up at faculty levels * No plans for improvement at faculty level * Feedbacks are not well used at faculty level
DTU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mission and goal are publically available on the website * Have QA strategic plans; but do not have clear procedures and measures to achieve the objectives in plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Adopting ISO model for quality management activities in the University * Does not have monitoring system * Data are still stored on paper and manually * Employers and alumni are not involved in the regular curriculum review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Institutional self-evaluation * Internal audit * Evaluation instruments were developed by other units in DTU * No program evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * No clear procedure for improvement plans

University	Mission/goal	Monitoring system	Evaluation instrument	Improvement plan
HSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Long-term mission and prioritizes the importance of quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Does not adopt a clear quality management approach to develop its internal quality assurance system * Review the University's implementation plan every year, and strategic plans every five year (which are called management retreat) * Employers are not involved in the regular review of curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Institutional self-evaluation * Internal audit (every 2 years) * One program accreditation by ACBSP * Good feedback system: surveys on the satisfaction of all stakeholders: teachers and staffs, new graduates, new students * All of these data are analyzed and documented, and especially are compared to the pervious data. * Teachers and faculty are informed the feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Evaluation results are unsolved * There are no consequences formulated
USSH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A long-term QA strategic plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Adopting ISO 9000 model to monitor their activities through the documentary system * Doesn't have a complete management information system * Most of curricular in the University hasn't reviewed and improved based on the feedback of stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Institutional self-evaluation * Internal quality audit system * Internal program self-evaluation * Evaluation instruments are also well-developed in USSH, including: survey on satisfaction of students, teachers and staff; survey on alumni, and survey on employers * All of data from these surveys are analyzed and documented * Teachers and faculties are informed with feedback results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The evaluation results are not well followed up at unit level

University	Mission/goal	Monitoring system	Evaluation instrument	Improvement plan
EUH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Long-term mission, which is publically available in its campus and its website * Short-term QA plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Does not apply quality management models for the development the internal quality assurance system * Periodic review on its long-term plans * Does not have monitoring system * Regularly review curriculum with the participation of stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Institutional self-evaluation * No program evaluation * No internal audit * Cooperates with the Department of Training Management-Student Affairs to develop the feedback system, including the surveys on the satisfaction of stakeholders: teachers and staffs, new graduates, new students and employers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Evaluation results are not followed up
BDE&TU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Mission and goal are not publically available * No QA plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Does not apply any specific approach for IQA * The monitoring system is simple: it doesn't include student evaluation, or student progress system or structural feedback from alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Institutional self-evaluation * No internal audit * Evaluation instruments are not well developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Decisions or actions to improve quality or to remedy possible deficiencies for the training programs might not be made based on the reliable sources of information
HUCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Have a long-term mission which is publicly available on University's website, brochure and in the place where it is easily noticed in University's campus * Developed strategies, short-term as well as medium-term plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Adopt SWOT model and PDCA procedures * Monitoring system has not been developed in EUCE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Self-evaluation * Regularly conducts students' survey on teachers, University's infrastructure and facilities, library, and academic support for students * Surveys on teachers are carried out twice a year * Alumni's surveys are conducted once a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation results are not followed up
TNU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Developed explicit mission and always serious about maintaining quality standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Adopt the EFQM model to monitor their activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Have developed questionnaires for course and subject evaluation, and conducted surveys on alumni 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * There are no improvement plans

University	Mission/goal	Monitoring system	Evaluation instrument	Improvement plan
	<p>as set by MoET. The mission and educational objectives are available on TNU's website and periodically reviewed in a 5 yearly cycle and a 6 monthly cycle respectively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Does not have effective monitoring system * Data and information are still stored manually through some documents * All curricular of the University were designed based on MoET's framework with the involvement of the academic committee and teachers; and all curricular were also periodically reviewed. * However, the weakness point mentioned in this report is that the conduct of survey on employers and alumni to collect related information used to review or adjust curriculum (if necessary) are not carried out regularly. 	<p>and employers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Self-evaluation * Program evaluation 	
DNU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * General mission was developed within DNU and publicly available on its website. * Established and disseminated QA policies and QA objectivities to each University members * However, at the level of University member, it was shown that not every members of DNU declared their mission, educational objectives, or quality policies on their websites 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Most of University members have developed the questionnaires to collect feedback on new graduates, alumni and students' satisfaction * Self-evaluation report 	

Table 14 Overview of description of each University: The influential factors on IQA implementation

University	Organizational structure		Organizational capacity			Contextual factors		
	Devolution of responsibility	Degree of centralization	Leadership	Staff's expertise	Resources	Oblige policy	Degree of training	Degree of autonomy
VU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Responsibility for QA at VU was devolved to lower level, which is faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Organized in a decentralized way: in the management board, there is a vice-rector specifically assigned to be in charge of QA; at faculty level, the Dean will be mainly in charge of the quality issue in general and 2 other academic staffs responsible for some quality assurance activities; besides that, at unit level, there is 1 staff co-operating with QAC in the field of quality assurance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * If the Rector doesn't care and is not enthusiastic about the issue of quality assurance; it will be seriously abandoned in the University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Consider it as very important; but have no plan to recruit expert in QA * More than half of QAC's staffs are taking responsibility for testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Financial issue is one of the biggest constraints which have influence on the implementation of IQA in Vinh University * Emphasized the difficulty of VU in paying salary to academic staffs who volunteer to be in charge quality assurance activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Didn't find any difficulties in implementing the Government's oblige policy of establishing quality center * Need a clear budget for QA activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Staff capacity building in implementing quality-oriented activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VU totally agree with the current degree of institutional autonomy given by the Government
CTU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Responsibilities for QA activities are well devolved to the lower levels in the University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Vice-rector: initial steering, administrating all QA activities in the University, and developing QA procedure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Was considered as one of the most influential factors to the IQA implementation in the University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Vice Rector participated in many seminars, workshops and training related to QA in abroad. Therefore he has deep understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Not important 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Develop more QA services * Becomes a leading Center in QA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Didn't see the current degree of autonomy given by MoET to CTU as a hamper on the process of implementing IQA

Uni- versity	Organizational structure		Organizational capacity			Contextual factors		
	Devolution of responsibility	Degree of centralization	Leadership	Staff's expertise	Resources	Oblige policy	Degree of training	Degree of autonomy
				<p>about QA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Consider it as important factor * Recruit the ones who have competence in English and computer * doesn't have long-term plan for the professional development in QA * sending staff to some small workshops or short training courses 				
DTU			<p>*leadership is a decisive factor to the implementation of IQA</p> <p>* leaders should recognize the essential of IQA system toward the improvement of institutional quality, and should have strategic vision</p>	<p>*highly important to the process of establishing the quality assurance system at</p> <p>* most of his staffs don't have expertise in QA or equivalent (educational management, for example), it's difficult for the Center to fulfill its</p>		<p>*more support in terms of capacity building on QA from MoET to implement the internal quality assurance effectively in accordance with the requirement of MoET.</p>		

Uni- versity	Organizational structure		Organizational capacity			Contextual factors		
	Devolution of responsibility	Degree of centralization	Leadership	Staff's expertise	Resources	Oblige policy	Degree of training	Degree of autonomy
			<p>on the development of their University</p> <p>*Institutional leaders should also support and pay much attention on the quality assurance activities</p>	<p>function.</p> <p>*capability personnel in QA (skills in data collection, data analysis, knowledge in curriculum design or the credit based system) will help the Center gain trust from other units as a role of supporters</p>				
HSU	<p>*Dean is responsible for the quality of program content, the timely curriculum, or the innovation in education</p>	<p>*the quality structure at HSU is organized in a decentralized way</p> <p>*Rector described her role in managing finance, human resources; distribute appropriate teaching hours; and establishing coherent management procedures</p> <p>* emphasized the important role of the Dean in the</p>		<p>*Important but not decisive factors.</p> <p>*the personnel of the QAC need to be competent on the appropriate education, training and skills (SPSS or computer), and especially have a sufficient proficiency in English.</p> <p>*emphasized the English competence of the staff.</p>	<p>*Funding, doesn't decide whether or not IQA is implemented well at the University</p>	<p>*Need more training on QA</p>	<p>*emphasized the importance of training in QA in order to help the Universities know more about the notion of QA</p> <p>* the training on QA is truly necessary</p> <p>* training on QA is not only essential for QA officers, but also for senior leadership as well as middle management at the</p>	<p>*fully agreed with the degree of autonomy given to private Universities</p>

Uni- versity	Organizational structure		Organizational capacity			Contextual factors		
	Devolution of responsibility	Degree of centralization	Leadership	Staff's expertise	Resources	Oblige policy	Degree of training	Degree of autonomy
		<p>process of assuring quality</p> <p>* Deans at HSU have been given much authority & responsibility</p> <p>*Deans can have authority in recruiting and dismiss teachers</p>					University	
USSH				<p>*the lack of expert in QA has made the issue of quality assurance in Vietnam's higher education be in crisis</p>			<p>*QA officers at most of the Universities are really in need of being trained on *QA expertise</p> <p>the short training courses, held by MoET, are not very effective</p>	
EUH		<p>*The role of Dean and Head of Subjects are highly emphasized in the process of achieving educational quality of EUH</p> <p>*the faculty can propose to</p>	<p>*leadership is very important</p> <p>*management should be convinced of the need for quality improvement</p> <p>*there should be full commitment</p>	<p>*mentioned the importance of skill and knowledge in QA in helping QA staff fulfill QA tasks in the University</p> <p>*Most of QA staffs have specialization on computer or</p>			<p>*the short training courses about QA activities are very useful for the higher education institutions in helping them develop an IQA system</p>	

Uni- versity	Organizational structure		Organizational capacity			Contextual factors		
	Devolution of responsibility	Degree of centralization	Leadership	Staff's expertise	Resources	Oblige policy	Degree of training	Degree of autonomy
		implement the curriculum which they think is suitable for their students; or they can volunteer to conduct self evaluation for the purpose of preparing for program accreditation	to the development of a system in order to achieve desired quality	business administration *QA knowledge on QA assessment, internal audit or quality measurement				
BDE & TU	*Vice Dean is the one who is responsible for the quality issue in the faculty		*leadership is the most important factors toward the effective implementation of IQA system *the senior leader should have a vision of his/her institution's future have ability to communicate his/her vision or the vision of institution to his/her staffs	*since the personnel in the QAC have no expertise in QA, they have difficulties in fulfill QA tasks				

University	Organizational structure		Organizational capacity			Contextual factors		
	Devolution of responsibility	Degree of centralization	Leadership	Staff's expertise	Resources	Oblige policy	Degree of training	Degree of autonomy
HUCE			* Leadership at all levels should be pulled in the same direction and there should be a balance between top down steer and bottom up responsibilities to promote QA process in the Universities	*for the scarcity in capable personnel (experts in QA), QA activities in most of the Universities are more or less similar with administrative activities, not yet professional and does not bring any actual effect on quality management	*having adequate financial resources to invest into the facilities for teaching and learning is also a challenge to EUCE		Emphasized the importance of human capacity in QA to enable University to implement IQA effectively; therefore, training on QA is needed	
TNU	*Responsibilities for QA activities were well devolve to the possible lower levels in TNU		*Leadership is very important, mostly deciding the success of IQA processes in the University		*Self evaluation is costly, and so is accreditation	*Should impose explicit consequences on the University that does not meet quality standards; especially MoET should impose a fine on unqualified University		
DNU			*Leadership as a factor can influence the success of IQA process	*Highly important, there would be more difficulties during the implementation of	*Financial resources as a factor that influence QA process in the	Does not cause any troubles for DNU		*Degree of autonomy that MoET currently has imposed on Universities in

Uni- versity	Organizational structure		Organizational capacity			Contextual factors		
	Devolution of responsibility	Degree of centralization	Leadership	Staff's expertise	Resources	Oblige policy	Degree of training	Degree of autonomy
				IQA if the persons in charge of the development of IQA system have no expertise in QA	University			general does not cause any troubles for the DNU regarding implementing QA process

Apart from the responses for the interview questionnaire that were developed based on the study's conceptual framework, additional comments and remarks from respondents on how to promote IQA processes in the Universities in general were also taken into account. This might shed more light to the study under investigation on the condition and requirement needed for IQA implementation in the context of Vietnam's higher education. Table 15 summarized all these additional comments of respondents.

Table 15 Overview of description of each University: Conditions and requirements are needed to implement IQA system

University	Conditions and requirements are needed to implement IQA system
VU	*Transparent budget for QA activities
CTU	*external forces from the Government *accreditation is a useful tool to force the Universities pay more attention on their quality *the result of accreditation should be available publicly and should have the legal value in society
DTU	*More training on QA
HSU	*Leaders understand the notion of QA
USSH	*Increase the Staffs' awareness toward the importance of IQA *MoET's standards should be more reliable
EUH	*Staffs' involvement *it's necessary to increase staffs' awareness toward the importance of IQA in the University's development
BDE&TU	*MoET should impose clear statute of accreditation on the Universities
HUCE	*Training on QA is needed
TNU	*MoET should impose fine on unqualified Universities
DNU	*The Resolution of the Party should include the issue of quality assurance

ANNEX 2: Summary of self evaluation reports, focusing on Standard 3 (in MoET’s Accreditation Standards)

University	Standard 3: Training program: The university’s training program is developed based on the core training program frame issued by the MoET; and is relevant to the university’s missions, objectives, functions and duties. In addition, the training program is closely related to learners’ needs and the human resource demands of the labour market. (MoET’s accreditation)	
	Strengths	Weaknesses
VU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the training programs have definite educational objectives, which are relevant to University’s missions. - The training programs are designed systematically based on MoET’s framework - The training programs can satisfy the needs of learners and labor market demand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The University did not involve the participation of employers in the process of designing the training programs - Some training programs did not satisfy the needs of employers - The University did not conducted the feedback collection from employers - The University did not conducted the feedback collection from new graduate and alumni
CTU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The university has detailed curriculum and references for the majors offered by the university, which was designed according to the credit-based system. - The curriculum was designed by the institutional academic committee with the participation of teachers and management officers in developing curriculum: needs analysis, objective definition, curriculum design, curriculum implementation and curriculum evaluation - The curriculum is flexible and satisfies the need of learners and labour market demand. - Periodically collecting feedback on the curriculum from employers, graduated students, educational institutions and other organizations to amend and supplement the curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The feedback from employers and new graduate, which were collected in the annual meetings between CTU and employers as well as new graduate were not well documented
HSU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the training programs were designed based on the core training program frame issued by MoET with the involvement of the faculties’ management officers, teachers. All the training programs have definite educational objectives, which are relevant to University’s mission and objectives, and are periodically reviewed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The comprehensive program evaluation were not conducted - The University did not officially collect feedback from employers during designing and establishing the training programs. - Not every faculty in the University collected the feedbacks on internship students from employers

<p>EUH</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the training programs are designed based on MoET's framework with the involvement of the academic committee and teachers; the training programs are also periodically reviewed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The University did not regularly conducted feedback collection from employers
<p>HSSU</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the training programs were designed systematically and have detailed curriculum. The educationally objectives are publically available on the University's website - There is a participation of stakeholders (students and teachers) in the periodic review of curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The University did not regularly collect the feedback from employers and professional associations.
<p>TNU</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The University has detailed curriculum and references for the majors offered by the university - The University involved all management staffs at faculty level and program level to establish training programs and design teaching planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some subjects did not focus on training the adequate skills for students - The University did not regularly conduct survey on employers and alumni for the contribution to improve curriculum

ANNEX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

➤ **Questions developed to explore the implementation of IQA in institutions on the perspectives of QA directors:**

Indicators	Questions	General purpose
QA centers	<p>The quality assurance center was established to support other units in carrying out quality-oriented activities in the universities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Can you describe the main function of this center? 2. Can you describe how the process of this center works within your university? <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is the center’s quality assurance plan developed and approved? - How are the protocols, instruments, document and reports regarding quality assurance developed in this center? - How are the protocols, instruments, document and reports regarding quality assurance disseminated to other units in the university? - What type of procedures in communication and decision-making on activities regarding quality assurance does this center have? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Can you describe how the responsibilities regarding quality assurance are devolved between this center and other units in the university? <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the responsibilities of this center for the quality management activities in other units? - What are the responsibilities regarding quality assurance of other units for this center? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exploring the devolution of responsibilities regarding quality assurance through the university. - Exploring the flow of decision-making regarding quality assurance through the university.
QA process	<p>In order to implement the educational objectives effectively, universities are encouraged to establish a quality management system in accordance with the school’s recourses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How was the quality assurance system and mechanism at your university designed? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is it tailor-made to the university’s needs and does not apply any ready-made model? - Is it institution-specific but follows national QA frameworks and guidelines? - Does it apply a ready-made model such as TQM or ISO? 	
Monitoring system	<p>Monitoring system contains the information that the university collects and stores, serving three main functions: to formally regulate desired levels of quality of education outcomes and provision; to hold educational service providers accountable; and to support ongoing improvement in education at university level. Therefore, a good monitoring system is considered essential to the process of institutional quality assurance:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Can you describe such information system for monitoring institutional activities in your university? For example, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does it include the information of student progression and success rates? - Does it track graduates’ employment? - Does it include students’ satisfaction with their programs, or available learning resources? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining to see whether the university applies any specific approach for its quality-oriented activities. - Examining to see whether the university has the processes in place to ensure the quality.

Evaluation instrument	<p>The periodic assessment and evaluation are important activities toward the process of internal quality assurance in universities, so can you describe:</p> <p>6. How is the periodic review process of annual plans and long-term plans conducted at university level as well as faculty level?</p> <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does your university have course evaluation? - Does your university conduct student evaluation and teacher evaluation? <p>7. What evaluation instrument does your university have? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey on the satisfaction of students, teachers, staffs - Survey on alumni - Survey on recruiters and employers - Or, a set of key performance indicators was defined and universities review its progress based on them 	
Quality improvement	<p>8. After the evaluation reports, are the evaluation results read and discussed at university level as well as faculty level?</p> <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are teaching staffs and students informed the results of their feedback? - How are the results of evaluation followed up at university level and faculty level? - Does your university have improvement plans? What are the procedures to develop these improvement plans? - If quality is not satisfied, what type of procedures in decision-making does your university have? - If quality is not satisfied, what type of consequences is formulated? - In your opinion, how important are the follow-up activities to the effectiveness of quality system? <p>Even though solving the evaluation results in order to close the feedback loop is quite important to the process of quality assurance; it is often ignored in the university.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your opinion, what made it difficult to have the evaluation results implemented? 	
Staff's expertise	<p>Playing a role as supporters for quality-oriented activities in university, QA officers are required to have expertise in quality assurance, for examples knowledge in educational management and quality assurance, skills in data analysis and statistics or skills in writing self-evaluation reports</p> <p>9. As a director of quality assurance center, do you agree with that idea? Do you think that staff working for QA center must have expertise in quality assurance? Why?</p> <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your opinion, to what extent the QA staffs' expertise will influence the process of implementing quality system at university level? - In your opinion, which skills and knowledge do the QA officers should have in order to support the university in the process of implementing quality assurance at university level? - What are your policies in terms of quality assurance officers? For example, does your center only recruit the staff with expertise in quality assurance? Can you give more examples? What are the reasons for these policies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing the information regarding QA officers' expertise, which then can show the importance of the staffs' expertise in quality assurance

<p>Degree of training</p>	<p>10. Since 2008, the projects of Profqim, HEP1 and HEP2 have been helping the Vietnam's higher education develop quality assurance by training some universities to implement the quality system.</p> <p>If your university participated in Profqim, HEP1, and HEP2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What did they train your center? - What do you think these trainings benefit the university? - Do the trainings bring you the results as expected? - To what extent have the university's evaluation and monitoring capacity been improved since the training? - Besides Profqim, HEP 1 and HEP2, is your university participating in any other projects/ international projects that relate to quality assurance? - To what extent these international projects improve the IQA implementation in your university? <p>If your university didn't participate in trainings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What difficulties does your university have in developing the quality assurance process? - What difficulties does your university have in managing the QA center? - Do you think the training on quality assurance is really necessary? In what sense? - Are there seminars or workshop on quality assurance for the leaders and QA staff in your university? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining how training can benefit the university in terms of quality assurance, and the influence of international projects on IQA implementation.
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➤ **Question developed to explore the factors that matters on the perspectives of Rectors:**

Indicators	Questions	General purpose
Devolution of responsibility	<p>Quality assurance is the primary concern of the university and it has cost the university much effort in implementing well the quality system. It is said that the quality assurance activities should not be considered as a separate activities for specific units or persons in the universities. Therefore,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As the rector, what are your roles and responsibilities in the process of quality assurance in university? 2. How are the responsibilities regarding quality assurance devolved through your university? 3. In your opinion, to what extent this way of devolving responsibilities through your university can help to achieve the quality-oriented activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining how the responsibilities in relation to quality assurance are devolved through the university and its influence on the quality assurance system in the university.
Degree of centralization	<p>A quality structure can be organized at the central institutional level but it can also be organized in a decentralized way. Decentralized system means sharing decision-making power and monitoring duties to the people in the university, such as teachers, researchers and administrators. Centralized systems often establish rules based on standards set by external stakeholders.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How does the process of decision-making on quality assurance work at university level? <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does each faculty within your university have an academic staff in charge of quality assurance? - Does each faculty within your university develop local strategies of quality assurance based on the general institutional strategic framework? - Can you describe the procedures in implementing the process of quality assurance within your university: when does the faculty have to conduct evaluation reports; to whom the faculty submits the evaluation report; who can formulate the recommendation; and how is the issue of quality discussed within the university? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To what extent the current decision-making process supports your university to achieve the quality-oriented activities? 6. In your opinion, how should the quality structure be organized to improve the IQA implementation in your university? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining how decision-making on quality assurance is structured in the university and its influence on the way quality assurance system is developed in the university.
Leadership	<p>People said that leadership in institution is very essential to the success of quality assurance process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. As a rector, in your opinion, how important is the role of senior leadership in leading the process of quality system at university level? <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a rector, how do you promote the process of quality system in your university? - As a rector, how do you engage staffs to be involved into the process of quality system? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining the perspective of rectors toward the importance of leadership in leading the quality assurance process. - Examining to see

		whether the Rectors are aware of the importance of leadership to the issue of quality assurance
Funding	<p>It is indicated that quality assurance costs resources. Therefore, some people think that the available of financial resources can partly play a role in the success of IQA implementation.</p> <p>8. In your opinion, how important is the issue of financial resource to the process of implementing quality system in your university?</p> <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does your university have financial problems with regards to quality assurance? Can you give some examples? How does your university solve the problems? - To what extent the limited financial resource influence the process of quality assurance in your university? - In your opinion, what is the most difficulty caused by this problem during the process of implementing quality system in your university? 	- Examining if financial resource has any influence on the IQA implementation
Oblige policy	<p>In 2004, Government started to impose the policy of establishing quality center with the purpose to enhance the quality system in every university in Vietnam's higher education system</p> <p>9. In your opinion, to what extent this policy influences the process of implementing quality assurance system in your university? Can you give some examples?</p> <p>10. Does your university have any difficulties in implementing this policy? How do you deal with these difficulties?</p> <p>11. In your opinion, in order for the universities to implement well this policy, what conditions and requirements are needed?</p>	- Examining the opinion of university towards the policy of establishing quality center set by the State
Degree of autonomy	<p>Nowadays, autonomy has become a hot issue in Vietnamese higher education system. The Government has been asked to give universities more autonomy; however, this issue is still very controversial.</p> <p>12. At presents, to what extent the universities are given autonomy and how this influences the quality assurance?</p> <p>13. In your opinion, to what extent the lack of institutional autonomy will influence the process of quality system in your university? With regard to curriculum, entrance exams, financial dependence, and other ... Can you give some examples?</p>	- Providing information on the issue of autonomy in relation to quality assurance issue.

➤ **Question developed to explore the factors that matters on the perspectives of Deans of the faculty:**

Indicators	Questions	General purposes
Devolution of responsibility	<p>Quality assurance is the primary concern of the university and it has cost the university much effort in implementing well the quality system. It is said that the quality assurance activities should not be considered as a separate activities for specific units or persons in the universities. Therefore,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As a dean of the faculty, what are your roles and responsibilities in the process of quality assurance in university? 2. How are responsibilities relating to quality assurance devolved within your university? 3. In your opinion, to what extent this way of devolving responsibilities through your university can help to achieve the quality-oriented activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining how the responsibilities in relation to quality assurance are devolved through the university and its influence on the way quality assurance system is developed in the university.
Degree of centralization	<p>A quality structure can be organized at the central institutional level but it can also be organized in a decentralized way. Decentralized system means sharing decision-making power and monitoring duties to the people in the university, such as teachers, researchers and administrators. Centralized systems often establish rules based on standards set by external stakeholders.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. How does the process of decision-making on quality assurance work at the university level in general? <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does each faculty within your university have an academic staff in charge of quality assurance? - Does each faculty within your university develop local strategies of quality assurance based on the general institutional strategic framework? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To what extent the current decision-making process supports your faculty to achieve the quality-oriented activities? 6. In your opinion, how should the quality structure be organized to improve the IQA implementation at the faculty level? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining how decision-making on quality assurance is structured in the university and its influence on the way quality assurance system is developed in the university.
Leadership	<p>People said that leadership in institution is very essential to the success of quality assurance process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. In your opinion, what are the roles and functions of the Deans' leadership in leading the process of implementing quality system? <p>Follow-up questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a dean, how do you promote the process of implementing quality assurance at faculty level? - Do you think the current way of leading the process of IQA implementation in your university can support your faculty to achieve the quality-oriented activities? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining the perspective of Deans toward the importance of leadership in leading the quality assurance process. - Examining to see whether the Deans is aware of the importance of leadership to the issue of quality assurance

<p>Curriculum</p>	<p>In general, the educational programs and curricular in universities are established based on the curriculum frameworks set by the State. However, in order to ensure the quality, the programs and curricular should be designed in a systematic way.</p> <p>8. Can you describe the process of designing and developing the educational programs as well as curriculum in your university:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are the curriculum and educational programs monitored at the faculty level? - Do you think this way of monitoring the curricula and educational programs can help the university enhance its quality system? - In your opinion, how should the curricula and educational programs at faculty level be monitored in order to enhance the quality system in the university? 	
<p>Staff development</p>	<p>As mentioned in many reviews of literature, professional development is considered as a major requirement for raising staffs' quality awareness so that staffs will perceive quality assurance process as useful, and therefore the quality assurance process can be implemented effectively at local level.</p> <p>9. As a dean, do you agree with that idea? Why/why not?</p> <p>10. In your opinion, how does your faculty develop staff development programs so that they can benefit the quality assurance process?</p> <p>11. Can you describe the difficulties facing your faculty in developing these staff development schemes so that they can be linked to internal quality assurance arrangement at faculty level? How does your university deal with these difficulties?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining to see if the university develop staff development scheme in an integrated and coherence way with the issue of quality assurance so that staff will consider the process of implementing quality system as useful

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