



Quality audit of educational institutions at Thai Nguyen University of Technology – Current situation and solutions

Nguyen Huong Ly

Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of International Training, Thai Nguyen University of Technology, Vietnam

Abstract

In the context of globalization, the requirements and challenges of quality assurance for higher education are increasingly higher. For higher education institutions, training does not only stop at quality assurance, but must also explain the quality of the training program to learners, employers, relevant stakeholders and the society. With such implication, educational quality accreditation is a mandatory requirement for the existence of educational institutions in the national education system in accordance with the law. This activity is a necessary condition to ensure that educational institutions continue to operate. On the other hand, this is also an opportunity for educational institutions to develop quality improvement plans after accreditation. Accreditation activities at higher education institutions include accreditation of educational institutions and accreditation of the training program quality. The University of Technology soon grasped the development trend and the inevitable requirements for improving quality through accreditation activities, so up to now the University has had obtained a lot of results in this work. However, because this is a new requirement, there are still many difficulties and limitations in the implementation process. Therefore, proposing new solutions to improve the quality of this work for the University is really necessary in the current context of university autonomy.

This article evaluates the current status of the quality accreditation of educational institutions at the University of Technology and then proposes a number of solutions to improve the quality of this work at the University, making a practical contribution to meeting the needs of the University and meet the requirements of higher education innovation as well as quality assurance conditions to implement university autonomy.

Keywords: Accreditation, quality, training programs, university

Introduction

In recent years, the development of the 4.0 Industrial Revolution and the strong impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, etc. have directly affected all aspects of social life, including higher education, which directly trains high-quality human resources and plays a leading role in the social development. This is pressure, but at the same time it is also the driving force for comprehensive change in education in the world. To meet the human resource needs for the new industry and take advantage of the strengths of digital technology, the University of Technology has been developing appropriate training models from the philosophy of education, designing training programs based on output standards, updating curriculum content to train skills for learners to meet practical requirements, and applying digital technology in teaching. This is also the goal of the general quality accreditation work of the University of Technology.

Content

1. General theory about quality inspection

1.1. Some related concepts

- **The quality of a higher education institution:** Is the response to the goals set by the educational institution, ensuring the requirements for educational goals of the Law on Higher Education, in accordance with the requirements for training human resources for socio-economic development of the locality and the whole country.
- **Assessing the quality of a higher education institution:** is the collection, processing of information,

and making judgments based on assessment standards for all activities of the educational institution, including: ensuring the quality of strategy, ensuring the quality of the system, ensuring the quality of implementing functions and operating results of educational institutions.

- **Quality accreditation of higher education institutions:** Is the activity of evaluating and recognizing the degree to which educational institutions meet educational quality standards issued by the Minister of Education and Training.
- **Self-assessment:** Is the process in which educational institutions self-review and research based on educational quality assessment standards issued by the Minister of Education and Training to report on the current state of educational quality, effectiveness of training activities, scientific research, human resources, institutions and other related issues so that educational institutions can adjust resources and implementation processes to meet the educational quality standards.
- **External assessment:** Is the survey and assessment process of an educational quality accreditation organization based on educational quality assessment standards issued by the Minister of Education and Training to determine the level of meeting educational quality standards of educational institutions.

- **Set of standards for assessing the quality of educational institutions:** is the level of requirements and conditions that an educational institution must meet to be recognized as meeting educational quality standards. Each standard corresponds to an area of activity of the educational institution; in each standard, there are a number of criteria.
- **Criteria for evaluating the quality of educational institutions:** Are the level of requirements and conditions that need to be achieved in a specific aspect of each standard.
- **Expected Learning Outcome:** Is the minimum requirement for knowledge, skills, level of autonomy and personal responsibility that learners achieve after completing the training program, as committed by the educational institution with learners, the society and publicly announce with conditions to ensure implementation.
- **Program at a specific level of a field of study includes:** Goals and output standards; training content, methods and activities; physical and technical conditions, organizational structure, functions, tasks and academic activities of the unit assigned to implement training in that field of study.
- **Curriculum of a training program at a specific level includes:** General goals, specific goals and output standards for the major and each module; training content, assessment methods and duration for each major and each module.
- **Benchmarking:** Is the activity of comparing and contrasting an educational institution or training program with a set of standards for assessing educational quality or with the selected educational institution/training program.
- **Stakeholders:** Related to educational institutions include learners, lecturers, staff, leadership and management teams, employers, partners, learners' families, investors, and agencies, direct management agencies, state management agencies in charge of education, other relevant organizations and individuals.
- **Educational philosophy:** Is a set of core views that guide educational goals, content and teaching methods, and the roles of teachers and learners in educational activities.

1.2. Role of quality inspection

Education quality accreditation has been formed and developed for a long period. At present, this activity is increasingly popular because it is an effective tool to help universities control and ensure training quality, improving the competitiveness of educational institutions. According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation-CHEA, *Accreditation is an external quality review process used by higher education to survey and evaluate educational institutions and training sectors to ensure and improve quality.* In Vietnam, *“Education quality accreditation is the main measure to determine the level of implementation of*

educational goals, programs, and content for universities and other educational institutions. Education quality accreditation is performed periodically throughout the country and for each educational institution. The results of education quality accreditation are publicly announced for the society to know and monitor” [6]. Basically, the educational quality accreditation has 4 major roles.

Firstly, educational quality accreditation gives universities the opportunity to systematically review all of their activities and thereby adjust their activities according to a certain standard. There are many different views on quality, such as: The quality is assessed by the factors “input”, “output” or by “added value”, etc. However, to accurately assess the quality of a university, it is impossible to consider only one aspect of the university, the quality of input or output, but requires an overall view of the entire university’s activities. That is the role of quality accreditation itself will not immediately create quality for each university, but it is a mirror that reflects the entire current situation of the university, helping managers see the strengths and weaknesses of your unit so that you can take appropriate next action steps.

Secondly, the quality accreditation helps universities orient and determine quality standards for each activity. Quality standards were first determined by the Ministry of Education and Training in 2007 (Decision No. 65/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT dated November 1, 2007 of the Minister of Education and Training) which is a set of standards including 10 standards with 61 criteria and specific indicators that university need to achieve to ensure the comprehensive quality. Analyzing and describing the current situation, finding strengths and weaknesses, and making action plans and solutions to address these shortcomings are the development directions for the next stage of universities.

Thirdly, the educational quality accreditation is a firm statement to stakeholders about the current quality status of the university. Firstly, voluntarily registering for accreditation is considered a commitment to the quality of training that the university brings to learners and other stakeholders, such as: employers, partners, and the society. In addition, external assessment activities are performed through third parties who are experts with experience in training, research and higher education management, with accreditation training certificates and/or accreditation cards of education quality accreditors will be highly objective in recognizing the quality of the university. Therefore, accreditation results provide relevant parties with timely and accurate information to confirm the university's training quality, thereby providing a basis for choosing appropriate services.

Fourthly, educational quality accreditation creates a premise for building a quality culture for educational institutions. The quality accreditation activities are based on indicators and standards for evaluation, so this information will help each member of the university better understand his or her work and that of those involved to achieve quality, thanks to which they know how to proactively continuously improve the quality of their work, contributing to related people acting according to quality, then a quality culture will gradually form at higher education institutions.

2. Current status of implementing training program quality accreditation activities at the University of Technology

2.1. Results achieved and causes

Up to now, the University of Technology has gone through 02 evaluation cycles and is one of the few higher education institutions in the country to complete 02 cycles of evaluating the quality of the University. The recently completed 2017 - 2022 evaluation cycle of the University is marked as one of the successes, recording comprehensive results of the University's work areas, focusing on 3 basic tasks: training – scientific research – community service. The achieved results reflect the current status of quality accreditation activities, specific results are shown through the university accreditation process in 2 basic activities: self-assessment and external assessment.

Self-assessment activities: Self-assessment, preparation for external assessment and implementation of quality assurance to be recognized for quality are always identified by leaders of the University of Technology as one of the key tasks and top priorities. This is clearly shown in the Resolutions of the University Party Congress for the 2015-2020 term and the 2020-2025 term; in the Strategic Plan for the development of the University of Technology for the period 2016-2020 and vision to 2030 issued on December 31, 2016, adjusted and supplemented in the Development Strategy for the University of Technology for the period 2021-2025, vision to 2030 issued on April 28, 2021. At the same time, the roadmap to achieve specific targets is detailed in the University of Technology's Strategic Plan for Educational Qualification for the period 2021-2025, including: self-assessment and external assessment of university-level education quality according to the standards of the Ministry of Education and Training in 2022; inspect 02 training programs in accordance with AUN-QA version 4.0 standards in 2023; accredit 11 training programs by 2024 in accordance with the standards of the Ministry of Education and Training. To implement the roadmap for quality assurance at the educational institution level and the training program level, the university's annual plan for implementing quality assurance activities is built through the Resolution of the University Party Committee; Report on the Conference of officials and employees of the University and the plan for educational accreditation/ In particular, in the work direction for the 2021-2022 university year, it is clearly determined "Basically complete the university accreditation assessment cycle 2 and evaluate a number of Curriculum" is one of five key tasks of the University.

External assessment: In 2017, after completing a self-assessment of the quality of education institutions and implementing an external assessment in accordance with the standards of the Ministry of Education and Training, the University of Technology was recognized by the Council of Accreditation as meeting educational quality standards according to the Resolution No. 06/NQ- Education Quality Certification dated October 23, 2017, and issued a Certificate by the Center for Education Quality Accreditation - Association of Vietnamese Universities and Colleges in accordance with the Decision No. 106/QĐ-KĐCLGD dated December 11, 2017 with 51/61 criteria meet the requirements. Based on the results of self-assessment and external assessment, in 2017, the University

developed a quality improvement plan for the period 2017-2022. In 2018, the plan to improve education quality was supplemented and adjusted to comply with the new set of standards of the Ministry of Education and Training issued with the Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT. After completing the mid-cycle review of quality accreditation, in October 2022, the university will take steps to self-assess educational institutions in cycle 2, period 2017-2022 and prepare for external assessment, moving towards quality accreditation. The University has established a Self-Evaluation Council consisting of 23 members, a Secretariat consisting of 19 members and 06 specialized working groups. To carry out the self-assessment task, the Self-Assessment Council meets and assigns tasks to the Secretariat to develop a draft self-assessment plan and the Council promulgates the plan, assigning tasks to members of the Council, in specialized groups. At the same time, the University disseminates its policy of implementing self-assessment to all officers, lecturers, staff, learners and relevant parties through the vnptioffice document management software, and organizes training on the standards how to collect and analyze evidence information, self-assessment methods and how to write self-assessment reports.

From the 2017-2018 university year, the University of Technology began to develop a plan to implement self-assessment of the training program according to the set of standards of the Ministry of Education and Training issued together with the Circular No. 04/2016/TT-BGDĐT and the guiding documents of the Department of Educational Testing and Certification (now the Department of Quality Management) - Ministry of Education and Training. Since then, this work has been maintained regularly and continuously by the University. To date, there have been 04 training programs that have been self-assessed by the University. To implement self-assessment of training programs, the University's Rector issued a Decision to establish a self-assessment council, secretariat and specialized working groups for each training program. The Self-Evaluation Council has the function of helping the Principal direct the implementation of self-assessment of the training program and propose measures and solutions to improve the quality of the training program's activities. Assist the Self-Assessment Council is the Secretariat consisting of 01 officer from the department specialized in Quality Assurance and lecturers implementing the self-assessment training program. The self-assessment plan for the curriculum is developed by the Self-assessment Council and widely disseminated to all officials, lecturers, staff, learners and relevant parties via the university's vnptioffice document management software. To implement self-assessment of training programs, the university's quality assurance department regularly guides specialized groups to write reports. In 2021, based on resources, the University decided to register for external assessment of 02 training programs in accordance with the standards of AUN-QA version 4.0 and was accepted for assessment in the third quarter of 2023. In 2021, based on resources, the University decided to register for external assessment of 02 training programs in accordance with the standards of AUN-QA version 4.0 and was accepted for assessment in the third quarter of 2023, the University has successfully established a Self-Evaluation Council and specialized working groups to assist and develop a plan for self-assessment of training

programs according to AUN-QA educational quality accreditation standards version 4.0 for these 02 training programs.

To serve the implementation of the self-assessment of the quality of education institutions in cycle 2, the University has developed a plan to implement the work of quality assurance of education at the University of Technology in the 2017-2022 period. In particular, each standard/group of standards is assigned responsibility to the appropriate functional units. At the same time, the University proactively develops and promulgates a set of standards to evaluate the quality of unit education; develops and promulgates a set of standards for assessing the quality of education at the program level according to the AUN-QA 4.0 set of standards; develops and implements a mid-cycle review plan; develop ISO 9001:2015 process on self-assessment of educational quality and support for external assessment; develops a plan to evaluate graduating students according to output standards (period 2017-2019) for university-level training programs; promulgates regulations and guidelines for developing output standards and regulations for developing university-level training programs for uniformity throughout the University to serve self-assessment and external assessment of the training program. In addition, every year, the University develops plans and sends staff and lecturers to attend short-term training sessions on quality assurance, self-assessment and external assessment of the training program as well as educational institutions conducted by the National University, the Ministry of Education and Training, etc. In addition, in the period from 2018 to present, the University has sent 09 officials and lecturers to attend training courses for accreditors in quality accreditation of higher education and professional secondary education, increasing the total number of staff of the University who have Certificate of Completion of the Auditor course for 11 people.

Through the hard work of all officials, employees, learners and through a rigorous evaluation process. The Center for Educational Accreditation of Hanoi National University has recognized and awarded quality accreditation certificates to the University for the 2017-2022 period and quality certificates to 04 training programs: Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering; Electronic telecommunications engineering and automotive engineering technology according to the quality standards of the Ministry of Education and Training in March 2023. At the same time, in August 2023, the University completed the external assessment according to the AUN-QA standards for 02 training programs and received approval results for these 02 programs in November 2023. These are great results in the quality accreditation work of the entire University in recent times, proving strict compliance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training on quality accreditation of educational institutions and training programs and at the same time showing the University's activities have tended to adhere closely to the principles of the Ministry of Education and Training's quality standards to ensure quality and synchronous development of the University.

At present, the University is continuing to implement a self-assessment plan for 09 training programs according to the standards of the Ministry of Education and Training; 02 self-assessed training programs according to the AUN-QA standards set are expected to organize external assessment

in the first quarter of 2024 to achieve the goal of 100% of the University's training programs that are eligible to receive the quality accreditation until 2024.

2.2. Weaknesses and causes

In addition to the results achieved in the university's accreditation work through recent evaluation cycles, in the process of implementing this work, the University also encountered some difficulties such as:

Firstly, sometimes there is a lack of determination and commitment from the university's leaders. The internal quality assurance activities in general and educational quality accreditation in particular are a long-term process, requiring the participation and consensus of all officials, employees and students. The reality has showed that if the leadership has the right awareness, really cares, invests effort, and provides close direction, the university's accreditation work can be carried out properly and effectively. The determination and commitment to implementation will also create motivation for the collective to work towards the goal of improving the quality of training and service of the university. However, currently not all managers are fully aware and see the importance of accreditation, so it will be very difficult to implement this work. Therefore, at some times, the implementation work is not really drastic.

Secondly, the awareness of officials, employees, and students about educational quality accreditation is not high. Up to now, the quality accreditation is no longer a new issue in Vietnam; however, its implementation to all relevant subjects in the university is still ineffective. Many lecturers, students, and employers do not fully understand the role, effects, and content of the quality accreditation. This lack of understanding is mainly due to propaganda and promotion work, and university self-assessment and accreditation activities are mainly carried out by a few specialized units, and have not really become regular activities at the university so that relevant subjects can easily access and grasp information.

Thirdly, the lack of experience in implementing and writing self-assessment reports to conduct quality inspection. Most members of the Self-Evaluation Council are administrators in charge of many tasks at the university, so they rarely invest adequate time in self-evaluation activities. In addition, the teams responsible for writing self-assessment reports lack experience and have not been trained in information collection, processing, and evidence techniques. There is a lack of coordination between specialized groups during the self-assessment process, and joint discussions between specialized groups and between specialized groups and the Self-assessment Council are rarely conducted. These things make quality accreditation difficult when experts evaluate largely through the university's self-assessment report.

Fourthly, there are difficulties in collecting, using, and managing evidence for self-assessment. It can be said that collecting and analyzing evidence is difficult for all universities. The reason is that the storage work is not good, for example, it has not become a habit to save documents to record the content of meetings or disseminate work, especially many data have not been statistically compiled in tables for easy evaluation by the evaluation team to monitor and evaluate the university's changes and trends and developments in the future.

Fifthly, the funding for quality inspection activities is limited, which is related to the payment of remuneration to participants as well as compensation. Therefore, mobilizing staff to participate in this work outside of professional work faces many difficulties.

3. Some solutions to improve the quality of training program quality accreditation activities at the University of Technology

In recent times, the work of educational quality accreditation at the University of Technology has been strengthened, focusing on the results of the accreditation work, which are: The University is recognized as meeting quality standards for cycle 2, period 2017 - 2022; 04 training programs meet quality standards according to the evaluation standards of the Ministry of Education and Training; 02 training programs are in the preparation stage for external assessment in accordance with AUN.QA quality standards in August 2023. To better implement the work of education quality accreditation in the coming time, the University needs to implement the following solutions:

Raising awareness of all officials, workers, and learners about the role, meaning, and tasks of quality accreditation in the University

Correct and sufficient awareness of accreditation activities at educational institutions is a prerequisite for determining the quality of accreditation implementation at the University. Because this is one of the relatively new activities, most officials, workers and learners in educational institutions do not have a correct, substantive view of this activity, leading to an indifferent attitude, not paying attention, and not closely monitoring inspection activities. This causes many difficulties in implementation. Therefore, raising the awareness of all officials, workers and learners about accreditation, its nature, role and significance for the existence and development of the University is the most important solution with the goal of spreading quality culture and building a quality working environment in the University. To implement this solution, it is necessary to focus on the following tasks:

Firstly, it is necessary to promote and improve propaganda work on quality accreditation for officials, workers, and learners to have a full and correct awareness of the meaning and importance of this work. From there, it contributes to spreading and building a culture of quality throughout the University. Accordingly, for propaganda work, it is necessary to organize training sessions; seminars and discussions on this issue so that lecturers and students can grasp the nature and importance of accreditation work. Besides, it is necessary to innovate communication work such as being neat in content; rich in forms for highly effective propaganda work.

Secondly, regularly and effectively carry out preliminary and summary work of accreditation with a wide participation of the University's leadership and management staff to expand understanding and spread knowledge about quality accreditation in this team.

Continue to promote the leadership role of the Party Committee, University Council and the strong implementation of the Board of Directors on accreditation work

The role of leadership, direction and implementation is very important to the success and effectiveness of accreditation for each university. Based on awareness and correct assessment of the role of this work, the Party Committee and University Council have issued drastic instructions on accreditation work issued in guiding documents. Along with that is the proactiveness in planning and implementation of the University Board of Directors. Thanks to that, in recent times this work has had many important results. In the coming time, to further improve efficiency, it is necessary to continue to promote and promote the leadership role of the Party Committee and University Council in this work, becoming a key task in plans and strategies of the University development. Create unity and synchronization in direction and implementation to improve and promote the role of quality inspection.

The University promulgates appropriate regimes and policies and invests reasonable resources in accreditation work

Based on the orientation and policies of the Party Committee, University Council, and University authorities, it is necessary to promulgate appropriate policies for accreditation activities through reasonable allocation of resources for the work to contribute to promoting promote development inspection work. At the same time, create a mechanism to encourage the internal inspection team to promote the role of this team.

Regularly review and strengthen the Quality Assurance Council and specialized groups in accordance with the practical situation and ensure regularity and continuity in the council's activities.

Focus on building an elite team with high capacity in accreditation to specialize this activity in the University.

Building an elite, professionally proficient and skilled team is a very important condition to promote accreditation activities of educational institutions. The team was built to handle the accreditation work well, aiming for specialization and professionalization to reduce the investment in human and material resources of the University and related parties, especially in the work of making self-assessment reports.

Accordingly, the basic solution is to invest appropriately in building an elite team by sending participants to courses, training, participating as observers at other educational institutions, etc. to gain experience and improve professional knowledge and expertise in inspection.

Innovating working methods creates smooth coordination and smooth communication between units in the University

For units throughout the University, it is necessary to adjust and improve methods of storing evidence information, working methods, and coordination with related units to create data connectivity between training units and training service units, creating a synchronous and accurate database to serve the University's activities in general and accreditation work in particular.

For all officials, employees, and learners, there needs to be a change in work habits and style, raising awareness and responsibility associated with assigned responsibilities and

tasks to contribute to building a quality working environment culture throughout the University.

In addition to the basic solutions above, for the results achieved in the recent external assessment of the quality of educational institutions and training programs of the University of Technology, the University needs to focus on Focus on some specific tasks as follows:

Firstly, develop and implement a master plan to improve the university quality according to the process of "Plan – Do – Check – Act" (PDCA).

Secondly, periodically review, supplement, adjust and effectively implement the University's goals, vision, and development strategy;

Thirdly, perfect the internal quality assurance system according to regional and international standards and some advanced universities in the world; strengthen the unit responsible for quality assurance; strengthen internal quality assurance capacity for the University's officials and employees; develop the University's annual quality assurance plan and implement the proposed plan;

Fourthly, carry out accreditation of training programs according to regional and international standards in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training.

Conclusions

The quality of training fields is maintained if training programs with standards consistent with the requirements of stakeholders are built, continuously improved, appropriate decisions are made and training programs are provided in accordance with the published procedures. Quality assurance and accreditation play a very important role, a fundamental factor that helps maintain, improve and enhance the quality of all areas of each educational institution. Quality accreditation at the University of Technology is of concern, especially ensuring the quality of training programs and educational institutions from design to operation and program evaluation. Regarding the assessment of training program quality, in addition to the internal monitoring and review system at the unit, the University of Technology regularly implements review and improvement as a form of consulting, quality monitoring, and supporting units. With the motto of constantly improving quality, the University always repeats the PDCA cycle to continuously improve the quality of the training program. This is the key to maintaining the quality of the University's training program at a high level, meeting social needs.

References

1. Tran Thuy Anh. Ensuring and accrediting the quality of higher education in the context of university autonomy: Theory and Practice, Hanoi National University Publishing House, 2021.
2. Ministry of Education and Training. National standard regulations for higher education institutions, Circular No. 24/2015/TT-BGD&DT, 2015.
3. Ministry of Education and Training, Regulations on quality accreditation of educational institutions, Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGD&DT, 2017.
4. Ministry of Education and Training, Regulations on public implementation for educational and training institutions under the national education system, Circular No. 36/2017/TT, 2017.
5. Cuong NH. Distinguishing 3 models of quality assurance in higher education: Quality accreditation, quality assessment and quality audit, VNU Science Magazine: Educational Research, 2017;33(1):91–96.
6. National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Education Law, 2005.
7. National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Law on Higher Education, 2012.
8. National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Law amending and supplementing a number of articles of the Law on Higher Education, No. 34/2018/QH14, dated, 2018.
9. Quat PT. Promoting the building of quality culture, 2011.
(<http://www.vnu.edu.vn/btdhqghn/?C2149/N10834/day-manh-xay-dung-van-hoa-chatluong.htm>).