Developing and Operating a Quality Assurance System for High Schools in Vietnam

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Abstract: *One of the major missions of the education in Viet Nam in the time of international globalization and integration as well as in the national industrialization and modernization is to train high quality human resources for sustainable development of the country. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the efficiency of managing the quality of education in the education system in general and high school education in particular. This will be done through application of modern management models. Quality assurance (QA) is an appropriate quality management model which helps improve the quality of education successfully. Thus, developing and operating a quality assurance system (QAS) at high schools is very urgent and provides an effective solution for enhancing the quality of education of schools and contributing to improving the quality of education of the country.*

Keywords: Quality assurance, system, quality, high schools, Viet Nam

1. Introduction

In the process of integration of the education in Vietnam, the quality of education of high schools needs to be compatible with the objectives of the school levels, and has to reach the standards of international education at the same time. However, "the quality of education is low as compared to the demands for development of the country in the new period and the advanced level of the education of countries in the region and in the world". [4].

To enhance the quality of high school education, schools need to carry out activities to ensure quality of school education in a systematic and consistent way. In reality, school management activities in Vietnam follow the functional management models which are too bureaucratic and hierarchical. They are not appropriate either with the demands for education reform or international integration. In addition, the quality assurance system has only been paid attention to and developed at the higher education level. It is therefore very important to develop and operate a quality assurance system at high schools in Vietnam. This will help improve the quality of high school education, contributing to enhancing the quality of education of the country.

2. Quality Assurance System at High School

According to the United Nations Organization, QA is a means for an institution to confirm itself and to other institutions that all conditions are ensured for students to achieve all the standards/goals set by the institution (UNESCO, 1998).

AUN definition is that QAS is the system where managers and teachers use its management mechanism to maintain and improve quality. [1].

In Vietnam, the QAS has only been mentioned at higher education. There are three main components in the QAS of Vietnam, including:

- The system of internal quality assurance of universities and colleges;
- The system of quality assurance outside the school (external assessment system which includes policies and procedures and assessment tools);
- The system of quality accreditation organizations (external assessment organizations and independent quality accreditation organizations). [2].

Quality assurance system at universities helps to maintain and improve the quality of education. The school staffs (managers, teachers, and students) voluntarily use the QAS to maintain and improve the quality, which is used for evaluation and accreditation. Quality assurance systems at universities include management fields and contents which have close connections with the well established procedures, the standards and evaluation criteria along with the system operation mechanism. [5]. The quality assurance system at high school has a similar structure with the one applied for universities, and is shown in the following diagram:
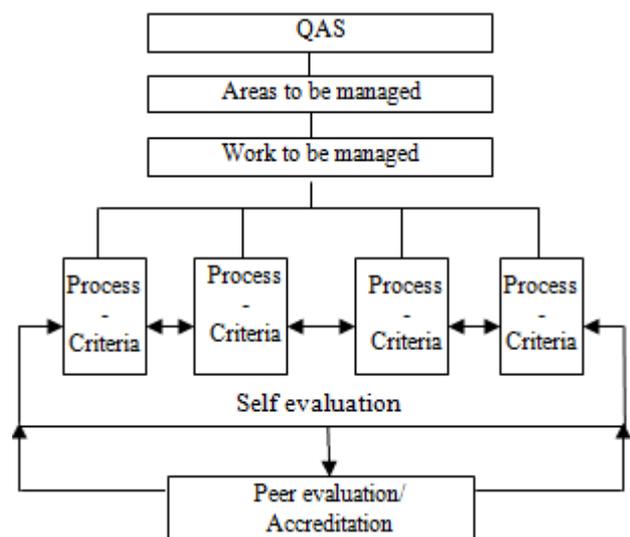

Figure 1: Quality assurance system at high school

3. Principles for Development and Operation of the QAS at High School

1) QAS determines the quality of products

Quality of products is shown by the features of the product and has to satisfy the needs of the users. However, the features of the products are created through many processes. It does not depend upon one single stage in the process. Therefore, the quality of the management system determines the quality of the products.

Based upon this principle, ISO 9000: 2000 stated "systems in quality management encourage organizations to analyze customers' requirements, to identify the processes which help customers accept the products and the processes under control. A quality management system can provide the grounds for continuous improvement in order to improve customers' and other stakeholders' satisfaction. It creates trust among organizations and customers that the products always meet the requirements.

2) Things are done correctly from the start

This principle is established on the basis that good products are produced from the errorless inputs. In production, products are of no use or they will have to be discarded if the designs are false and/or do not base upon the demands of customers. Doing correctly from the start will reduce the cost for repairs or reproduction. In education, doing things correctly from the start is even more significant since its products must be without any defects.

3) Prevention is the basic principle of management

This provision requires organizations to prepare written documents for prevention and recovery actions. It is important to analyze and find out the causes for any defects during the formation of the quality of products or services using statistics. On the basis of the causes, we will be able to identify and adopt relevant preventive measures. In education, producing false products has much more serious impacts than in the fields of business or production. Therefore, prevention is a very important factor in building the quality management system in general and the QAS in particular.

4) Process-based management

Process-based, management shows all linkages of the process. This model promotes the roles of customers and concerned parties in determining requirements as inputs. Each activity or a series of activities which use resources to turn inputs into outputs are considered a process. Institutions need to determine and manage many related and interactive processes so that they can operate effectively. As usual, the outputs of a process will provide inputs for the next process. The benefit of process-based management is the continuous control over the interconnected points of individual processes in the system as well as a combination and interaction among them.

4. Solutions for Developing and Operating the QAS at High Schools

a) Determining the contents of the QAS to be managed

Managers need to determine all contents to be managed from general management contents to detailed management work. This will help to assign specifically the management contents, forming the grounds for implementation of the next steps during the operation of the QAS process at schools. On the basis of determining the management contents, a diagram of management contents will be prepared. This will help managers identify the structure of the QAS with specific management contents. At the same time, the relationship and the interaction between management contents will be established. This will be shown in the diagram. During the preparation of the diagram for management contents, it is necessary to follow the order of the steps in the process, using the Deming model (Plan - Do - Check - Act); IPO model (Input - Process - Output). It is noted that the outputs of the previous management work will be the inputs of the next management work. This will continue until all management contents are finished.

b) Building the process for each management content of the QAS

The main feature of the QA and the QAS is to manage through strict implementation of the process with the established criteria. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a process with all compulsory management contents and specific tasks. On the basis of the structure of the QAS established, managers will develop a process with specific implementation steps for each management content. The QAS processes need to depend upon the demands and features of the management level in quality management. However, managers can start with levels of general quality management level so that they will be able to establish and develop the quality culture at schools depending upon the practical situation of the school. The processes of the QAS are developed with all specific management contents and tasks of schools. This is to say all management contents of schools are processed.

c) Developing evaluation standards and criteria for each management content in the QAS

Quality management is to manage in accordance with the standards, so developing evaluation standards and criteria for each management content of the QAS is an important step for building and operating the QAS at high schools. Determining evaluation criteria for management contents will help managers and school staff to observe the progress and the results of the implementation. At the same time, this will ensure the quality of implementation from the first step. School staff will not be allowed to skip any processes or move on to another step without finishing the work of the previous stage. This is because the product of the previous stage is the input for the next one. Thus, quality of management contents is completely ensured.

All school members need to guarantee to achieve the evaluation criteria in each stage of the process. This means that during the implementation of the stages, it is impossible

to move on to the next step if the result of the implementation is not satisfactory and does not reach the designed evaluation with specific evidence. Then, it is necessary to implement from the beginning of the stage until satisfactory results are achieved.

d) Operation of the QAS

Operation of the QAS is the fourth step in developing and operating the QAS at high schools. This is very important since the QAS is only efficient when it is operated. The system has operation mechanism and it has to be able to operate in specific environment. Once operated, the system operating will have positive impacts on ensuring and enhancing the quality of education of schools.

Building and operating the QAS will only have real impacts with the commitment of the school leaders. School leaders need to believe in the quality assurance philosophy and have to commit to implement the QAS. This commitment will create a close relationship between the missions, objective of the schools and the policies, strategies for the quality assurance activities. This will provide the foundations and give top priority to the QA activities. School leaders need to inform application and operation of the system to relevant stakeholders, school staff, teachers and students and need to commit to facilitate successful operation of the system.

As soon as the school leaders announce widely the operation of the QAS, all processes of the management system must be applied in a consistent manner with the active and voluntary participation of all participants in the QAS. This is to ensure that "things are done correctly from the beginning". In addition, the processes need to be undertaken through group work. This will help enhance the quality and start building the quality culture at schools.

e) Evaluating the QAS

Evaluating the quality assurance system is the fifth step and is very significant in building and operating the QAS at high schools. This is because the system will become a one-way imposing system with no feedback mechanism if there is no evaluation. Evaluating the system is to provide the grounds for preparing plans to improve and complete the system.

Evaluating the quality assurance system at high schools is regularly undertaken in various forms, including self-assessment and external assessment. In addition, it involves assessing the system level and assessing the implementation process.

Schools are requested to carry out assessment of the quality assurance system at system level and assessment of each stage of the process of the QAS. The aim is to help managers find out where errors actually exist in the system during its operation so that they will have proper recovery activities to improve and complete the QAS.

The QAS is assessed through:

The QAS is assessed by the following criteria:
Does the QAS exist or not?
If yes, does the QAS work? (Once, often,…) (Evidence).

If it works, does the QAS have positive impacts or not? (Evidence).
Does the output of the QAS achieve the standards or not? (Evidence).
For the process assessment, the assessment criteria include:
Does the process exist or not?
If yes, are the processes carried out or not? (Once, often,..) (Evidence).
If it works, does the process bring any benefits? (Evidence).
There must be specific evidence for the above mentioned criteria. In case there is no evidence, activities are not actually implemented.

f) Adjustment and completion of the QAS

Based upon the evaluation of the QAS, schools will have plans to adjust, improve and complete the quality assurance system. Schools will make adjustments and fix all the shortcomings in the QAS in a timely manner. At the same time, they will have measures to prevent recurrence for the completion of the QAS.

Since the high school quality assurance is an open system, schools need to increase the outcomes to ensure that they are equal to the standards in case the outcomes of the system are lower the designed standards. In addition, the system outcomes have to ensure the school objectives, to satisfy the demands of students and to meet the needs of the society and the labor market. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to improving the quality of school education in such a way that it will meet the needs of the society and employers. At the same time, it will serve the quality accreditation activities and reach the quality standards of countries in the region and in the world.

5. Conclusion

Development and operation of a quality assurance system at high Schools is an effective quality management method to ensure and constantly enhance the quality of education in a sustainable manner. The aim is to help schools achieve their education objectives and to meet the needs of learners. Learners will be qualified to study at university levels and will be confident to enter the labor market. This will provide the grounds for education accreditation activities and will also be one of the key measures that contribute to the reform of education in Vietnam. The construction and operation of quality assurance system is significant in raising the awareness and building habits, confidence, self-discipline of school staff. All of them will strive to fulfill their duties, which will provide an important platform for the formation of the culture of school's quality.

Construction and operation of a quality assurance system at high schools is an innovative approach in the management of education quality in Vietnam today. The successful development and operation of the high school quality assurance system will bring about positive and sustainable results to the quality of teaching and learning at high schools. It will also provide the consistence for the operation of the quality assurance system of higher education in Vietnam from high school level to the university level.

Consequently, it will contribute to ensuring and enhancing the quality of human resources of the country.

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