

Organizational Responses towards Changes: A Case Study in Vietnam

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Abstract: *Together with the internationalization and globalization in education in the world, Vietnam has reformed its education system. A number of universities, accordingly, have provided several innovation and adjustments to better their performance and quality to meet the demand of society. This study aims to investigate how the responses of ULIS to the subject matters can be assessed and evaluated. Therefore, evidence used by leaders is used to evaluate continuing impacts of the organizational response, the adjustment of direction, the inferences of the stakeholders based on qualitative data.*

Keywords: Changes, organizational response

1. Introduction

This study aims to investigate how the responses of ULIS to the subject matters can be assessed and evaluated. Therefore, evidence used by leaders is used to evaluate continuing impacts of the organizational response, the adjustment of direction, the inferences of the stakeholders based on qualitative data.

2. Background

University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS) was established in 1955. Since its birth, it was assigned the task of training qualified lecturers and graduates of foreign languages to meet the demand of the war against the US invasion. Since 1993 in the renovation era of all aspects of Vietnam society, ULIS has become among the seven members of Vietnam National University, known as a prominent institution in foreign language education. Currently, there are some highlighting issues facing ULIS, which can be named as teaching and learning, student motivation and financial support for professional development activities.

In ULIS, together with the innovation in the entire education system, the reformation in teaching and learning can be seen clearly, which well reflects the effort in switching from passive learning to independent and self study, active learning, from teacher-centeredness to learner centeredness. The innovation can be seen in the assessment and evaluation from summative assessment to formative one, strongly attaching the importance to constructive feedbacks to enhance teaching and learning activities. However, there is still a mismatch and unbalance between the theory and practice, between university and industry. Therefore, students are still lacking in soft skills, critical reading, critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Secondly, due to the long-standing ideology of the Eastern students, Vietnamese students are rather passive and are in the absence of intrinsic motivation. They study mostly for their parents' expectation, peer pressure or society needs.

Thirdly, professional development is among the top priorities in the University's mission and vision. However,

due to the lack of funds and financial support and the pressure for higher education, it poses a threat to brain drain and turnover among the staff members and teachers in the University.

While Dew (2010) suggests the importance of building a team spirit to strengthen the relationship among members in the organization, McCaffery (2010) puts the emphasis on the role of the leaders. Both seem to be vital to our organization.

3. Research Questions

The report aims at finding the answers to the above research questions:

- Who is/are in charge of the policy making process?
- What strategies used to make sure that the policies are implemented?
- Who are the stakeholders of the policies?
- What challenges facing the implementation of the policies?

4. Research Methodology

Different research methods are used to match various paradigms. In the context of learning and teaching, Moses and Knutsen (2007) relate the nature in research methods and knowledge pursuit, in which qualitative employing grounded theory, interpretative approach, or phenomenological way is highly appreciated. Meanwhile, quantitative methodology in the form of case study, statistical is more commonly used in naturalists. When it comes to employing a suitable paradigm, Drake (2011) puts the emphasis on the importance of the researcher's position. In contrast, it should be noted that the environment itself, the type of knowledge, and the position of research which can help to choose the most appropriate research approaches (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007) state that it is the landscape of knowledge, surroundings and the study position which will decide on the choice of methodologies. It is true that whatever the method is, the main focus should be drawn in the hypothesis, research questions, and assumptions. In ULIS context, when it comes to the perceptions, comments as well as feedbacks on leadership, policies' making process or responses to the changes, qualitative is more welcomed.

In addition, the use of survey questionnaires, observations, and in-depth interviews can be used mixed methods. To confirm the validity, reliability and practicality of the research, the use of surveys, interviews to interpret assumptions and perceptions encourages qualitative research methods more than quantitative method. In the meantime, the application of mixed method was taken into consideration and it could well serve the aim and answer the questions of the study.

5. Discussion

Evidence-based approaches used by leaders to evaluate impacts of institutional response

In policy-making process, there are five factors that have been introduced by midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (2015) namely issue identification, analysis, deliberation, implementation and assessment. In the words of Beattie et al. (2013), there are 'unintended consequences' of changes that can affect favorably and unfavorably. In such changes, it is the culture that has been acted as a motivating power shaping the changes; in return, strategies may on one hand, enhance the organization culture; on the other hand, causing may both help to habitualization, reinvention, erosion, behavioral defiance and distraction to the unique (Beattie et al., 2013). It can be seen that ULIS is experiencing tensions from outside and inside sources. Coaldrake and Stedman (1999) suggest the harmonious combination of flexibility, adjustment and steadiness and uniformity.

To ensure the amount of reliability and consistency, process and system involving staff, management level, and the collaboration and interaction is strongly suggested by Coaldrake and Stedman (1999). Such tools have been adopted by ULIS throughout the years. Towards the missions and visions, ULIS members have shared the common voices, ideas and concerns as to the policy making process. When the new policies have been introduced, there will have the open discussions, talks and ideas contributions in spoken and written forms. Only by doing that, members keep the sense of community and sense of belongings. Equality and social justice is among the most common natures of ULIS. It serves as the effective strategy that leaders have been applying in ULIS so far.

One of the ideas from an interviewee shared that:

“...What I appreciate most in ULIS working environment is there is no such thing as inequality. Everyone is seen important equally. For example, any formation of new policies such as working hours, innovation in education or even policies in scientific research is openly discussed by all members from faculty level to management level. Taking part in union, and association in the university, I am involving the revision of policies. We reflect what has been done and has not yet done to fulfill the organizational goals...”

The evidence used for the leaders in the evaluation of the impacts of policies is from their staff members' feedbacks and comments. From different levels, members are asked to get engaged in evaluating the effectiveness of the policies,

which can act as a revised tool for the transformation of strategies. For example, regarding the issue on the turnover, brain-drain and drop out among staff members, Brown (2013) introduced a fixed-term contract to help the increasing degree of commitment. That is applied in ULIS since 2013. Fixed-term contracts ensure the job security, financial scheme and sense of belongings. At the beginning of 2017, ULIS welcomed 12 PhD holders completing their courses to come back to their working in ULIS. It is true that during four years of the new contract policies, the number of turnovers decreased more than two-fold from 27 in 2013 to 5 in 12 in 2016.

When it comes to increasing level of student's participation, and the correlation between university and industry, ULIS now switching to a more business-like institution, unlike other universities that apply dual enrollment (Brenneman et al., 2010), ULIS links a number of industrial zones and other oversea universities to send students to do oversea and practical internship in factories. Job orientation programmes and fairs are opened quarterly. This provides a golden opportunity for students to get access to the job market and understand thoroughly the market demands and how to bridge the gap between their education and working conditions. Last year 2016, ULIS experienced the surge in the number of students' enrollment by more than 200 students in Faculty of English Language Teacher Education compared to that in 2015. Added to this, to improve the financial current situation, enhancing standard of living for the staff members, since 2013 center for testing and assessment was born to introduce entry level and proficiency tests in four language skills. The introduction of such tests was a part of the National Foreign Project 2020, in which ULIS has been assigned by Ministry of Education and Training the leading role in designing national foreign language tests and organizing in-service training teachers from elementary level to institutional one. Not only do teachers and leaders get further involved in meeting the social demand for foreign languages but also they have better commitment to the community work. In service training courses in summer allows ULIS teachers to take part in without struggling to find a part time job when the school breaks up. In return, teachers feel more secure to devote to their teaching and working in ULIS, not to mention the fact that the improvement is seen in quality of life, modern facilities and infrastructure used for the revolution in education. E-learning maturity model (Marshall, 2010) has been introduced since 2015 to provide more learning modes for students both on and off campus (ULIS, 2014).

Evidence leaders use to evaluate its implications for different stakeholder groups

Internal stakeholders

According to Donoghue (2013), keys to success lie on different factors, among which effective communication is viewed as the most important. Thanks to the open and efficient communication strategy, ULIS community is enhanced. It is the staff members themselves that are the first and foremost stakeholders.

For instance, students' feedback towards teaching and learning activities has been applied for five years. Before

widely applied in the electronic format, paper form had been used and revised yearly to make sure that ideas and feedbacks are for learning and teaching, not to judge and criticize what haven't been done. Therefore, ideas from teachers and students were highly valuable. Longden and Yorke (2009) attach the importance to the use of feedback system as formative assessment of education, used as an enlightening and reflecting tool for teachers and educators to provide instant necessary changes and adjustments. The system can help to create two-side interactions between teachers and students, and help managers to better access to their members by listening to their ideas, opinion sharing and contributions (Ives et al., 2009).

“... What I like most about the feedback collection is I can have better chances to reflect and check what I am teaching, whether it is necessary or not, appropriate or not, updated or not. As you may know, in language teaching, up-to-date technology, teaching methods and classroom activities is of great importance. Therefore, one of the most challenges facing teachers nowadays is how to adjust their teaching method to be suited to the globalization and internationalization in the pursuit of excellent education quality...”

Therefore, in the four-year periods, stakeholders including managers, staff, teachers and students stand a chance of improving the quality of teaching, learning and management.

External stakeholders

As mentioned, ULIS is becoming more business-like organization. Some policies from National Foreign Project 2020 have helped other educators in different schools in Vietnam to take part in in-service training programmes offered by ULIS. The courses include innovation in teaching methodologies, assessment and evaluation in education, foreign language competence of Vietnamese elementary teachers of English. Besides, since the introduction of Vietnamese standardized test of English Proficiency (VSTEP) and its validity, reliability and practicality, Ministry of Education and Training has permitted ULIS to develop it to a format used for all Vietnamese people, from elementary level to higher education, from officers to engineers, from bankers to other service fields. What is more, other educators and policy makers from governmental level to institutional level are beneficiaries. They adopt and adjust policies from the success of ULIS.

Challenges facing the implementation of the policies

Resistance to change is named as the most difficulty among ULIS staff. This phenomenon can come from different sources namely environment, culture, and the main important cause is from human nature (Bradutanu, 2015; International Labour Office, 2002). In the context of ULIS, the fear of change and feeling for the resistance to change stems from the staff members, and the consequences of the past experience (International Labour Office, 2002). In the past 10 years, ULIS has experienced several reforms from top to down level. The changes come from the adaption to government policies, the internationalization and

globalization in education, job market and social demands. Due to the fact that some policies need trial and error period, time, money and effort devoted greatly put stress and burden on staff, giving rise to the fear for change. Additionally, sometimes there is the inconsistency from management level to staff level, which causes the misunderstandings in applying changes. For example, the application of technology in education, evaluation and assessment is strongly welcomed. However, the poor facilities and low technology hinder the application of modern teaching methods in education. Some lecturers are well prepared for such changes feel discouraged and dishearted when their efforts are down the drain.

It is of great importance for the management level to either view the resistance to change as a signal to get more information about the intended change or perceive as a problem to overcome (Champoux, 2016). In ULIS setting, it is more reasonable to view it as a source of information to have a better interaction between managers and members in achieving the outcomes. It is the role of leaders to well inform the staff the reasons for changes to achieve the targets.

6. Recommendations

There are trials and errors in ULIS strategies. However advantageous and favorable the environment is, several policies need revising and adjusting to be more suited to the current social context. To be more compatible with the globalization and internationalization in education, ULIS needs to learn lessons from other institutions to provide timely changes and adoptions. It is also of great significance to inform staff members about such changes and get them more involved in the policy making process. The success or failure of a policy is upon mainly how it is implemented. Some policies may show positive impacts; however, they remain out of date and unsuitable to the new context such as summative assessments in teaching, which increases the amount of passive learning. For several changes in technology in education, ULIS should draw meaningful lessons from other universities in harmonizing information technology with learning styles and teaching methodologies.

7. Conclusion

The study revises some impacts of policies towards the entire organization employing evidence-based approaches. Some of the strategies applied prove to be effective, creating positive domino effects on solving other problems such as financial burden, brain drain and reformation in teaching. However, the timely adjustments and active engagement of members in the policy making process require leaders to make a wise snap decision. It is the ultimate role of the leaders in creating a learning organization, where every member is free to raise their ideas to make a contribution the development of the organization.

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