Reforming the organizational structure for ODeL: A HOU's case study

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Abstract: For the last ten years, Vietnam has made significant efforts to improve national education system by increasing the number of new educational institutions; increasing the investment in education; redesigning the national university entrance examination; licensing for foreigner investment in education sector, diversifying the forms of learning etc. However, the distribution of education services in the regions is not uniform; the quality of education is still debated; there is still a big gap between academic knowledge and practical application and so on are the barriers to the development of education of Vietnam. In order to overcome these above issues, Open and Distance eLearning (ODeL) appears as one of the optimized solutions. In Northern of Vietnam, the main authority responsible for open and distance education is Hanoi Open University (HOU). Through 18 years of building and development, it has become one of the most active educational institutions of Vietnam. Although, ODeL is relatively new for the university and it requires HOU to evolved to adapt with the current situation. The research aims to analyze the effects of ODeL on the organizational structure of HOU and the way HOU deploying ODeL as well as some suggestions for ODeL implementation at university level.

Sub-Theme: Problems, Barriers, Reforms and Solutions.

Keywords: open and distance elearning, organizational structure, non-formal education

Introduction

Being a country with low starting point in economics, Vietnam has realized that education and training is the primary engine for development and also had appropriate investment in this sector. National education system has made solid step in universal primary education, gradually modernized to come up with countries in the region. However, Vietnam has a varied topology of hills, mountains (3/4 of the territory), plains, coastal, islands and continental shelf. Furthermore, it has 54 multi-cultural ethnic groups living in isolated areas of the country. In this context, non-formal education, especially open and distance education seems to be the answer to the problems that the formal education lefts behind.

The history of open and distance education in Vietnam can be tracked back to the sixties of the last century, where the first correspondence school was established. For more than a half-century of development, open and distance education has helped millions of people in the fight against illiteracy, millions of technicians, businessman, teachers, engineers, etc in comprehending and applying knowledge and skills in the industrialization and modernization process of the country.

Overview of Vietnam non-formal higher education sector

The undergraduate education system of Vietnam is divided into two sectors: formal and non-formal higher education. The formal higher education has some main features:

- Entrance requirement: Students must pass the National University Entrance Examination

- Attendant time: Full-time, in working hour

- Duration: 3 to 6 years

- Degree: Associate or bachelor degree

For formal higher education, the Ministry of Planning and Investment has the right to set the quota for number of student to be admitted to universities and colleges each year. While the number of participators has changed slightly (2008: 1,247,576; 2009: 1,261,941; 2010: 1,237,870; 2011: 1,276,000), the quota has increased rapidly (from 437,000 in 2008 to 502,357 in 2009, then to 513,817 in 2010 and 548,000 in 2011). The quota is increased annually to achieve the sub-goal set on Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA) in phase 2006-2020 "increase higher education enrolment to reach 200 students per 10,000 population by 2010, and 450 students per 10,000 population by 2020"
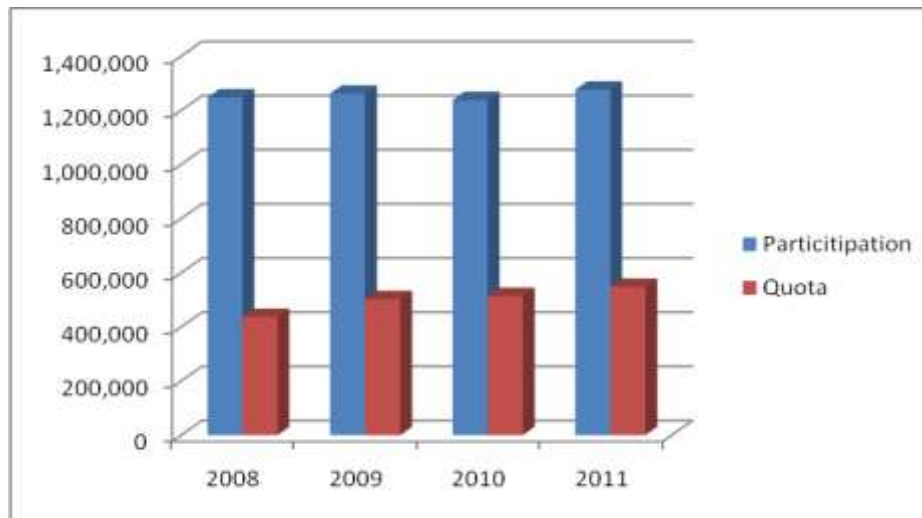

Figure 1. The quota/total students attending NUEE phase 2008-2011

(Source: Ministry of Education and Training - MOET)

However, the maximum quota among the years is only about 43.0% of total student attending NUEE, the rest of 57.0% has the chance to go to work or pursue non-formal higher education such as: in-service training, professional and vocational training, open and distance education, etc. Besides, every year, a huge labour force in the market participating non-formal education to improve their competence and skill:

- Technicians, engineers, businessmen, and administrators need to be provided with economics and technology knowledge.

- Thousands of demobilized soldiers need to be trained in economics and technology, so they can take part in the development of social production.

- Vietnam has fifty-three minority groups, most of which work in agriculture sector and reside in remote and mountainous areas where movement is difficult.

For such reasons, the demand for non-formal higher education grows at an ever-expanding level, in quantity, quality and diversity.

MOET sets the quota for almost every higher education institution on formal education based on the facilities, ratio of faculty to student, campus area, etc. However, the non-formal education sector is open for market competition as describe in the Table 1 below.

| No | Institute Name | Number of | | Percentage of |
		students	non-formal students	non-formal students
1	Vietnam National University, Hanoi	43,062	24,249	56.3%
2	Vietnam National University, HCMC	74,368	29,512	39.7%
3	Hue University	41,407	18,300	44.2%
4	Thai Nguyen University	52,052	29,000	55.7%
5	Da Nang University	45,777	17,198	37.6%
6	Can Tho University	32,433	10,963	33.8%
7	Hanoi University of Technology	42,411	20,389	48.1%
8	National Economics University	39,861	24,903	62.5%
9	Hanoi Agricultural University	19,538	8,867	45.4%
10	Hanoi Medical University	3,018	240	8.0%
11	Hanoi Pedagogical University	16,970	9,166	54.0%
12	HCMC University of Economics	44,323	23,460	52.9%
13	HCMC Medicine and Pharmacy University	6,836	1,625	23.8%
14	HCMC Pedagogical University	19,476	12,461	64.0%
15.	HCMC Open University	19,049	4,778	25.1%
	Total	500,581	235,111	47.0%

Table 1. Percentage of non-formal student in some large higher educational institutions -

academic year 2007-2008 (Source: MOET)

Except for the low percentages in two medicine universities has achieved (the medicine field requires formal education); the percentage could be as low as HCMC Open University (25.1%) to an extremely high level as in HCMC Pedagogical University case (64.0%).

While Vietnam's formal higher education system prefers inflexible, centralized, face-to-face, chalk and board approach, the non-formal higher education system has made significant changes by applying the latest achievements of human being in education technology, especially distance education technologies.

The situation of distance education in Vietnam

During the renovation period, the implementation of policies to diversify the types of education, MOET has issued regulations of higher education in the form of self-study guide (Decision No.2091/GD-DT on 07/10/1993).

In the same year, realizing the role of distance education in national education system, the government approved the establishment of two Open Universities at Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in 1993. The two universities are assigned the role of being the hub for distance education both in theory and practice. However, in order to attract researchers and lecturers these two OUs

are allowed to recruit formal education student passing NUEE. Moreover, the two OUs argue that distance education is a new form of education; they should implement traditional education first, while at the same time gradual researching, experimenting and deploying the distance education. The ratio of formal students/ distance students is also committed to be decreased each year. Besides, other 17 universities have been allowed to open distance education center from 1994 onwards.

No	Institute Name	Attending Students	Graduated Students
1	Hanoi Open University	42.000	21.500
2	HCMC Open University	39.519	7.024
3	University of Information Technology - Vietnam National University, HCMC	12.658	3.750
4	Hanoi Pedagogical University	45.327	38.795
5	Hanoi University	2.437	6.735
6	Post & Telecommunication Institute of Technology	4.540	297
7	National Economics University	2.500	0
8	Hue University	48.038	77.731
9	Da Nang University	14.541	3.100
10	Da Lat University	931	995
11	Binh Duong University	13.900	20
12	Tra Vinh University	2.300	0
13	Duy Tan University	3.400	0
14	Hanoi Pedagogical University No 2	400	0
15	Hong Bang University	0	0
16	Dong Thap Pedagogical University	0	0
17	Hanoi University Business and Technology	290	0
18	Long An University of Economy and Industry	-	0
19	Can Tho University	-	0
	Total	**232.781**	**159.947**

Table 2. Number of attending/graduated students in distance education - academic year 2009
(Source: Continuing Education Department)

To manage the training process at the university level in the form of distance education, MOET has also issued the Provisional Regulation on the admission, examination, inspection and certification for distance education (Decision 1860/GD-DT on 25/05/1995). After 8 year of

implementation, MOET has promulgated the Regulation on organization, training, examination, inspection and certification in the form of distance education (Decision 40/2003/QD-BGD&DT on 08/08/2003). Regulation has created a legal basis for the school, the local implementation of distance education activities to ensure quality and effective training.

Reforming organization structure to adapt with ODeL in HOU

The first distance learning program of HOU is established in 1995 for serving the staff of Voice of Vietnam. Until now, HOU has developed a wide range of distance education network throughout the country with 80 closely linked partners. By November 2011, the number of admitted student to distance education programs has reach to 123,018; 36,037 of them has graduated; about 40,000 are attending distance education courses at their local centers (Binh, 2011).

HOU provides 9 undergraduate courses through distance education: Business and Administration, Accounting, Economic Law, English, Information Technology, Telecommunication, Financial and Banking, Biology Technology. After graduating, students are awarded Bachelor Degree.

At the same time, the development of new technologies in distance education also poses a great demand for publishing educational materials. For that reason, the Audio-Visual Technology Studio and the Center for Distance Education Research and Development were born in 1993 to provide distance learning programs through television and voice broadcasting system. In 2009, the two units were merged to become the Center for Research and Distance Educational Materials. In 2011, its name is changed to the Center for Educational Materials. The educational materials are varied in forms with 60 in printed format includes: 40 in CD-ROM and 10 are packaged in SCORM format (Vuong, 2011)

At the infant phase, the distance education programs are under the control of Faculties, for example, the IT distance education program is under the control of the Faculty of Information Technology. Parallely, the Office of Admission is responsible for coordinating between Faculties and Remote Centers[1]. However, this mechanism has a significant drawback: The Office of Admission's main responsibility of dealing with thousands of formal education students, it is difficult to work simultaneously with two contrast forms of education: formal and non-formal education.

The situation requires HOU to create a new task force to cope with the above problem. In 1999, the Center for Distance Education Development (CDED) was established. Up to now, it has successfully opened about 80 Remote Centers throughout the territory of Vietnam. Its main missions are to (CDED, 2011):

- Propose solutions on developing and expanding distance education market.
- Strengthen supervision role on the cooperation activities between Faculties and Remote Centers.
- Propagate and recruit distance education students
- Organize scientific forums, workshop on distance education.

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[1] The closely linked partners are treated as the Remote Centers of HOU. Depend on the workload, the Remote Center will receive appropriate financial share

- Perform R&D projects and apply new technologies on distance education
- Develop comprehensive annual enrollment strategy.
- Store information about enrollment, course registration, academic record keeping and official transcripts

In 2007, the Faculty of Distance Education was established. All the distance education programs discretely managed by Faculties are transfer to the Faculty of Distance Education. It acts as a Faculty with multiple majors using distance education approach.

In 2011, the E-learning Center, previously launched as E-learning Program in 2008 under the direct management of the Office of the Rector, was upgraded to become an independent unit. From now on, the distance education programs and E-learning programs are managed separately by two different units.

However, HOU realizes that the bulky and inflexible management system of a public university is not suitable for E-learning approach. Hence, the E-learning Center is assigned the role of E-learning hub. This hub is then connected to several potential partners to deploy E-learning programs. The model takes the cooperation advantages of the flexible management mechanism of private organization and the academic reputation of a public higher education institution in implementing E-learning programs.

Interestingly, this particular solution has solved the problem that John Daniel posed at AAOU 25th "private providers offer eLearning more professionally than conventional public universities" (John, 2011).

In this situation, HOU cooperates with Topica Education Group, a private organization, to offer several E-learning Bachelor Degree programs: Business and Administration, Information Technology, Financial and Banking, Accounting. These programs use ODeL approach to provide knowledge and skills for student through E-learning portal.

The main responsibilities of the E-learning Center are:
- Design curriculums.
- Issue certificates and official transcripts.
- Manage student record keeping.
- Monitor and investigate throughout the learning activities of students.
- Provide quality assurance and program accreditation.
- Appraise educational materials for each subject.
- Coordinate the cooperation activities between Topica and the Remote Centers.

The main responsibilities of Topica Education Group are:
- Produce educational materials for each subject.
- Manage the E-learning portal.
- Provide technical support for student.
- Organize classes, schedules, examinations
- Provide tutors and educational advisors.

- Provide student services.

- Recruit students.

- Implement PR activities.

- Research the demand of market on E-learning

- Collect tuition fee.

- Control and manage the E-leaning program deployed at the Remote Centers.

Up to September 2011, the E-learning Center had recruited 6,403 students with 4,764 has finished the registration procedure; 1,639 are waiting for the procedures to complete. In 2011, the Center tries to enroll about 3,500 students.

In summary, HOU has splitted, merged as well as created units in order to optimize the application of ODeL in practice. However, the theory and practice of ODeL are just in the infant phase of development. This field requires much attention of policy makers, managers, coordinators, researcher, executors and so forth in order to make sure the successful implementation of ODeL.

Conclusion

Building a successful model for ODeL at a conventional university requires not only effort of the university itself but also contribution from outside organization. The academic community realizes that, for ODeL practices, the private organizations are ahead of the conventional university. In reality, they are rivals in the E-learning industry. Turning the competitors into the partners in this situation is not an easy solution. However, the reformation of the organizational structure of HOU as well as the flexible cooperation mechanism between HOU and Topica has proved an appropriate method for ODeL practice in a conventional university.

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