

# Is Global Quality Assurance System of Higher Education in United States, Vietnam and Japan Possible?

Japan Foundation  
Japan Studies Through Collaboration

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Doi:10.19044/ejes.v8no3a63

[URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/ejes.v8no3a63](http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/ejes.v8no3a63)

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Submitted: 02 June 2021

Accepted: 22 July 2021

Published: 30 September 2021

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## Abstract

Higher education has jumped into the quality movement with expectations of enhancing the excellence of education being received by students. The total quality management philosophy that dominated the manufacturing industry has found its way into the education industry. W. Edwards Deming developed a set of 14 quality management principles, which can be applied to the education sector (Hughey, 2000; Prasad, 2017). Accreditation is a mechanism to inform the employers, the public and students that a university or program has met the minimum standards for quality. The injection of accountability and accreditation into the educational system has raised the expectations of an institution. External accreditation has been growing worldwide in importance. This paper looks at the development of accreditation within the United States, Vietnam, and Japan. An educational curriculum was seen to be a pillar needed for growth for each country. It became apparent that all three countries realize the importance of quality and are heavily involved in the assessment process. There are some differences in who controls the curriculum and the assessment process. However, continuous improvement is universally shared among the three countries. Developing an understanding of the accreditation process will contribute to the literature surrounding accreditation and quality assurance.

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**Keywords:** Accreditation, Institutional Accreditation, United States Accreditation, Vietnam Accreditation, Japan Accreditation

## Introduction

In the United States, accreditation is about quality assurance and quality improvement (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2018). Accreditation is administered through the Council of Higher Education (private body) and the United States Department of Education (government body). The Council of Higher Education guidelines assures that institutions are maintaining and improving academic quality whereas the United States Department of Education guidelines assures that institutions have the minimum quality requirements in order to receive Federal funding. Neither of the organizations accredit institutions. However, both of the organizations approve the accrediting bodies deemed to be authoritative as to the quality of higher

education in the United States (Harman et al., 2010). After World War II, postsecondary education became of heightened interest of the Department of Education because of the military veterans expected to be attending college through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill).

North Vietnam's model of education was shaped after the French educational system, which was vocational schools. After the reunification of North and South Vietnam, the educational system in Vietnam shifted towards the Soviet Union educational model of specialization and research. Overtime, Vietnam's government made modifications to the educational system, and Vietnam academic structure began to move away from the Soviet Union model. By 2020, Vietnam plans to have a competitively advanced higher educational system that will meet international quality standards. Today, the new set of 25 standards with 111 criteria are being applied for accreditation at the institutional level. The economy of Vietnam has been rapidly growing by leaps and bounds. Vietnam experienced a massification of universities in the higher education industry. Today, the quality and relevance of higher education and the skills being developed with adequacy to the market needs is a concern. Quality assurance has entered the educational arena. Vietnam is experiencing what was seen earlier in Japan.

Japan's model of education was patterned after the United States higher education system. After a series of transformations, the volunteer reporting system witnessed in the United States transpired into a governmental reporting system in Japan. The main difference between United States and Japan accreditation is that the United States accreditation is concerned with enabling an institution to qualify for Federal support programs, whereas Japanese governmental recognition relates to the legitimacy of higher education institutions (Mori, 2009). After World War II, higher education in Japan exploded to meet the demands of the growing economy. Japan experienced a massification of universities in the higher education industry. Today, the Japanese educational system and the quality assurance system is being reformed. Japan followed the developments seen in the United States.

Quality has undergone many transformations over the years. Quality dominated the manufacturing and engineering industries from 1940-1980. In 1990's, quality emerged as its own profession, and spread from business into the public sector, including health care and higher education (Nair et al., 2010). Although the quality movement is relatively young in the history of higher education, its footprint is significant and persistent. Higher education institutions must continuously create, review, and renew its systems of quality assurance in its endeavors to ensure relevance, marketability, reliability, and stature. External quality assurance in higher education has been growing worldwide. As the internationalization and massification of higher education flourishes, higher education institutions must also be prepared to meet both domestic and global quality standards and expectations.

The objective of accreditation is to reassure stakeholders (such as employers, the public and students) that a university has attained a high level of quality instruction as evidenced by the degrees being granted by those institutions. A Ministry of Education does not exist in the United States and there is no Federal control over the quality of higher education. A Ministry of Education does exist in Vietnam and Japan. In the United States, national accreditation has the reputation of having lower quality standards for education as compared to regional accreditation. In Vietnam and Japan, national accreditation is required. Similar regional accrediting bodies exist around the world, further reinforcing its impact and scale. Quality is difficult to define, so it is natural to establish a standard as replacement for quality. The United States educational system receives many international students each year. In 2020, Vietnam and Japan were among the top ten countries with international students studying in the United States. The United States has a responsibility to promote opportunities for Vietnamese and Japanese students to study in the United States (and vice versa for U.S. students studying abroad). This paper begins with an overview of the higher education system in the United States. Personal interviews were conducted with representatives from Vietnam and Japan concerning the higher education system and accreditation within Vietnam and Japan. A comparison can be made between the United States,

Vietnam, and Japan. The manuscript concludes with the recommendations to consider for future research among United States, Vietnam and Japan.

## **UNITED STATES**

### **Higher Education Act:**

President Lyndon Johnson had a belief that “higher education [was] no longer a luxury, but a necessity”, and that opinion prompted the Senate and House of Representatives to pass the Higher Education Act (Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, 2018). On November 8, 1965, President Johnson formally signed into law the Higher Education Act. The higher education legislation was meant to “strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in postsecondary and higher education” (Public Law 89-329, 2018). The act designated Federal funding that was intended for university improvements (such as libraries and equipment); the act created scholarships (such as work study and fellowships); the act provided for low interest student loans, the establishment of an Advisory Council on Quality Teacher Preparation and the establishment of the National Teacher Corps.

The goal of the act was to advance colleges, expand college libraries and to provide financial funding for low and middle-income families. President Johnson identified the Higher Education Act as one of the “keystones of the great, fabulous 89<sup>th</sup> Congress” and the act was “the roots of change and reform” in the United States. (Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, 2018). President Johnson alleged that the Higher Education Act planted the seeds and education was the path to achievement and fulfillment for an individual; for the Nation, education was the path for a society that is free and civilized; and for the world, education was the path to peace (Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, 2018). A quality education is important for all stakeholders.

### **National Accreditation:**

The Secretary of Education controls the Department of Education, and the Secretary of Education makes recommendations to the President of the United States on Federal policies and programs. The Secretary of Education is a member of the President’s Executive Cabinet and is fifteenth in line for the presidency of the United States. The Higher Education Act authorizes the Department of Education to approve the accreditors whom the Secretary of Education concludes as being authoritative as to the quality of higher education being provided by higher education institutions (U. S. Department of Education, 2018).

The Secretary of Education is advised by the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity on matters regarding “accrediting agencies that monitor the academic quality of postsecondary institutions and educational programs for Federal purposes” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The objective of accreditation is to reassure stakeholders (such as employers, the public and students) that a university has attained a high level of quality instruction as evidenced by the degrees being granted by those institutions. An institution needs to be nationally recognized in order for its students to receive Federal financial aid. The Department of Education posts a list of nationally and regionally recognized accreditors whom are considered authorities as to the quality of higher education.

The United States Department of Education recognizes ten national accrediting bodies, of which nine bodies are active (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). According to the United States Department of Education (2018), the national accrediting bodies are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 – National Accrediting Bodies

- Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges
- Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training
- Association for Biblical Higher Education

- Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools
- Association of Institutions of Jewish Studies
- Council on Occupational Education
- Distance Education Accrediting Commission
- New York State Board of Regents
- Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools
- Accreditation Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (Inactive)

A Ministry of Education does not exist in the United States and there is no Federal control over the quality of higher education. The Department of Education “does not accredit individual educational institutions and/or programs and is not directly involved” in the accrediting process. Instead, the Department of Education provides oversight over the accreditation for higher education. The ten national accreditors review institutions based upon guidelines that permit those higher institutions to be included in the Federal student aid program. In order to ensure some level of quality in higher education, nongovernmental, peer reviewed processes are used. National accreditation has the reputation of having lower quality standards for education as compared to regional accreditation. A perceived lower quality education makes it difficult for students to transfer academic credit from a national accredited institution to a regional accredited institution. Regional accreditation is considered by stakeholders as being the more prestigious form of accreditation in the United States because regional accreditation has additional guidelines that are very stringent and have been utilized for a very long time (since 1885).

### **Regional Accreditation:**

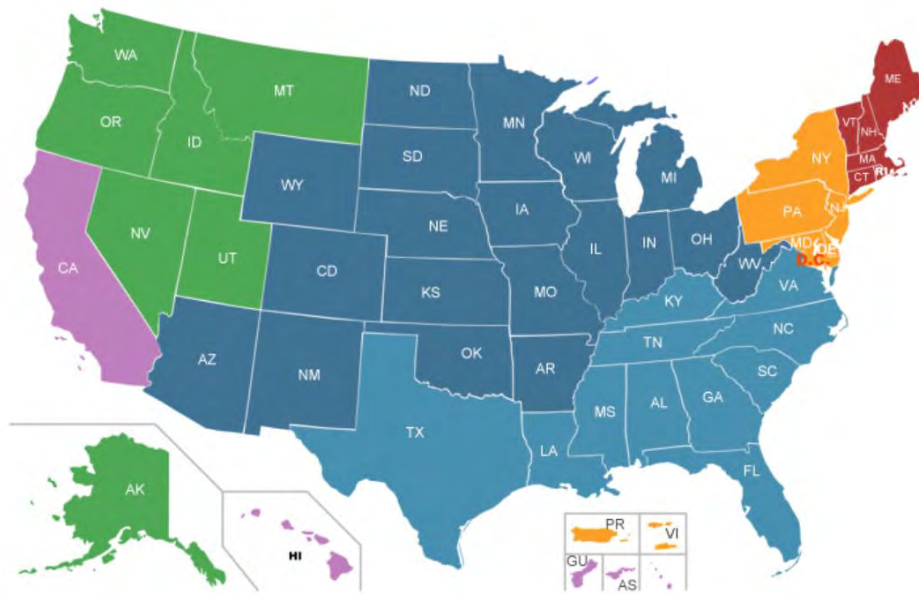
Originally, regional accreditation focused on accreditation of secondary schools in order to provide consistent college admission standards. Over time, representatives from the regional accreditation agencies expanded its responsibilities to include accrediting higher institutions. Today, over 100 full time regional commissioners oversee the regional accreditation in the United States. Approximately 15 percent (one out of seven) of the regional commissioners must be a public interest member (such as business or government). The field work associated with accreditation is carried out by over 3,500 peer colleagues who serve on a visiting team. Peer volunteers include a diverse group of university employees, such as academic officers, faculty, finance experts, presidents, and student services, among others. Regional accreditation oversees “the quality of research universities; community colleges; liberal arts colleges; state colleges; religiously affiliated institutions; special purpose institutions in the arts, sciences, and professional fields; military academies; historically black and Hispanic-serving institutions; and tribal colleges” (Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 2018).

It is the choice by a university to become regionally accredited. The quality standards are more stringent with regional accreditation as compared to national accreditation. Regional accreditation makes the transferability of course credits more likely between regional accredited universities. In October 2005, the Government Accountability Office published a report about transfer students. The Government Accountability Office found that 84 percent of institutions consider accreditation when determining to accept transfer credit (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Furthermore, about 63 percent of the institutions stated that regional accredited coursework would be accepted for transfer, and only 14 percent would accept national accredited coursework. The inability of a student to transfer credits can negatively impact a student. For instance, a student will need to retake courses, which can add length to his/her total degree, and this creates an additional tuition burden that a student needs pay. If an institution is regionally accredited, transfer credit is more likely to be accepted by the receiving institution.

In the United States, regional accreditation is split into territorial regions, as defined by the Department of Education. The regional accreditation responsibility in the United States is divided into six geographic regions (as indicated on the map below – Figure 1) with seven separate commissions. The seven regional organizations form the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions. The Council of Regional Accrediting Commission “encourages and assists in the improvement, effectiveness and excellence of affiliated educational institutions” (Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 2018). A university in the United States does not need to be regionally accredited, however regional accreditation demonstrates to stakeholders that the university has met a minimum quality standard for their degrees beyond the requirements for national accreditation. Moreover, about 69 percent of postsecondary regional accredited institutions have entered into voluntary agreements with each other for transferability of coursework (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2018). Accreditation provides assurance to stakeholders that institutions have met a level of quality and the value of the degree is confirmed. According to the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (2018), the seven regional accrediting bodies (Table 2) along with its regional accreditation responsibility area (Figure 1) (color coded to align with the regional map below) in the United States are below.

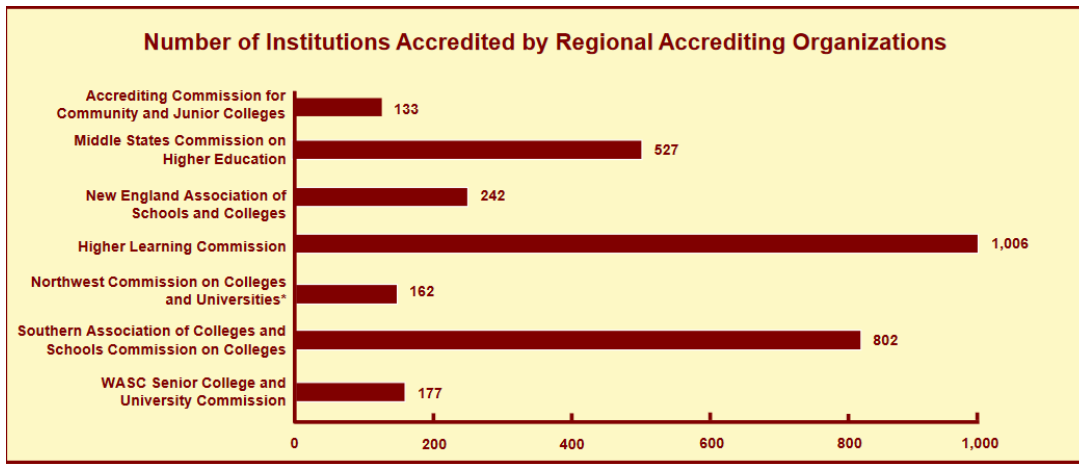
Table 2 – Regional Accrediting Bodies

- Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges
- Higher Learning Commission (formerly North Central Association of Colleges and Schools)
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges



Map Source: college-usa.org  
Figure 1 – Regional Accreditation Territories

Regional institutional accreditors accredit 3,049 public and private institutions as can be seen in the chart below (Figure 2). The Higher Learning Commission granted 33 percent (1,006) of the total regional accreditations within the United States. In addition to regional accreditation, national faith and career related accreditors accredited 4,847 institutions in 2013. In total, 7,896 institutions were accredited in 2013.



Source: CHEA 2013 External Quality Review

Figure 2 – Number of Institutions Accredited by Regional Accrediting Organizations

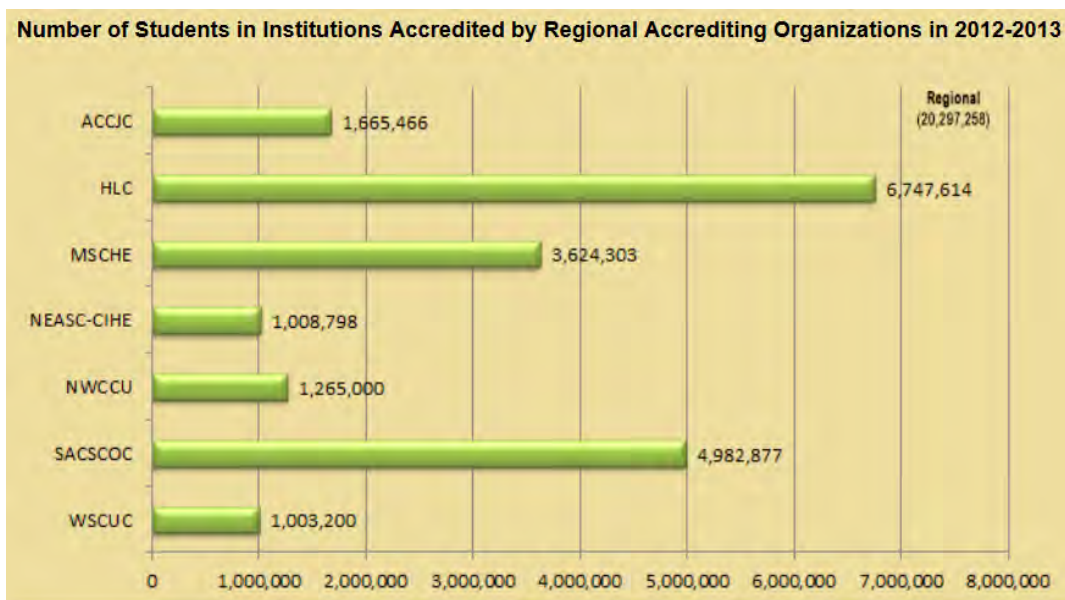
Programmatic accreditors accredit 42,686 specific programs, professions or schools as shown below (Figure 3).

	Public	Private Nonprofit	Private For-Profit	Institutional Control Not Indicated	Total
<b>Degree</b>	9,587	5,904	4,522	18,715	38,728
<b>Non-Degree</b>	1,190	532	445	1,791	3,958
<b>Programmatic Total</b>	10,777	6,436	4,967	20,506	42,686

Source: CHEA 2013 External Quality Review

Figure 3 – Programmatic Accreditors by Degree or Non-Degree Status

As seen below (Figure 4), in 2013, the Council for Higher Education Council (2015) reported more than 23,994,000 students were enrolled in accredited institutions. Regionally accredited institutions enrolled 85 percent (20,297,258) of the students (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2015). The other 15 percent of the students (3,697,483) attended schools with only national accreditation. The students attending regional accredit schools were primarily enrolled in institutions under the accreditation oversight of the Higher Learning Commission.



Source: CHEA 2013 External Quality Review

Figure 4 – Number of Students Accredited by Regional Accrediting Organizations in 2012-2013

### Accreditation:

Accreditation in the United States arose from the need to protect public health and safety, and to serve the public interest (Eaton, 2018). Accreditation is a mechanism to inform the employers, the public and students that a university or program has met the minimum standards for quality. Accreditation is required for students to access Federal and State funding. Accreditation is important to employers when evaluating the credentials of job applicants or deciding to reimburse employees for tuition. Accreditation is important for the transferability of college credits. According to the United States Department of Education (2018), the important functions of accreditation are to:

- Assess the “quality of academic programs at institutions” of higher education.
- Create a “culture of continuous improvement of academic quality at colleges and universities and stimulate a general raising of standards among educational institutions”.
- Involve “faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning”.
- Establish “criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading course offerings such preparation”.

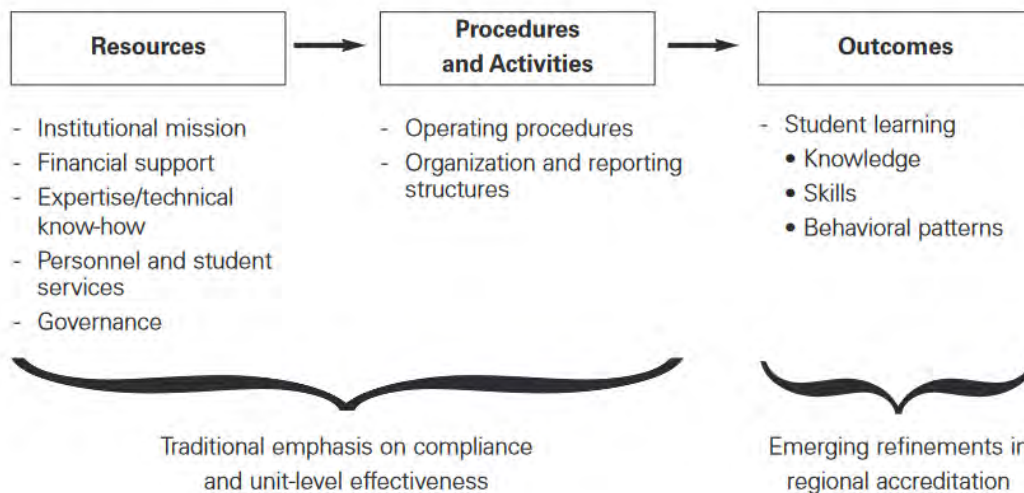
Accreditation in the United States is a “means to assure and improve higher education quality, assisting institutions and programs using a set of standards developed by peers” (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2018). Private, non-governmental and non-profit organizations carry out the accreditation process. An accredited institution or program signifies that the facility has the necessary resources available for student success, such as student support. There are two basic forms of regional accreditation. One form is institutional accreditation in which the accreditation applies to the entire university. The other form is a specialized or programmatic accreditation in which specific programs and/or departments are accredited.

### Institutional Accreditation:

Regional accreditation is a non-governmental, peer-to-peer evaluation on institutional quality. The regional associations are located in different geographic regions and reflect “historical and cultural differences in these regions” (Jackson et al., 2010). Institutional accreditation came about as the structure for institutions to deal with college credit transferability and student admittance into graduate studies. Institutional accreditors include: a) National Faith Based who accredit religiously affiliated universities; b) National Career Based who accredit for-

profit, career based institutions; and c) the six Regional Accreditors who accredit public and private, degree granting, 2 and 4 year institutions (Busby, 2015). The accreditation process has evolved overtime. The institutional process went from adhering to a set of strict standards to a process that demonstrates the effectiveness of the quality education towards meeting an institutions mission. Assessment surrounding student learning is a component of the regional standards.

The institutional accrediting bodies consider institutional quality as a whole during the accreditation process (Millard, 1984). As a result, institutional accreditors pay attention not only to the educational offerings of an institution, but also to its institutional characteristics, such as administrative strength, effective management, financial conditions, learning resources, library resources and student personnel services (Millard, 1984). The diagram below (Figure 5) illustrates the connection between accreditation methods and assessment outcome trends.



Source: Planning for Higher Education

Figure 5 – Connection Between Accreditation Methods and Assessment Outcome

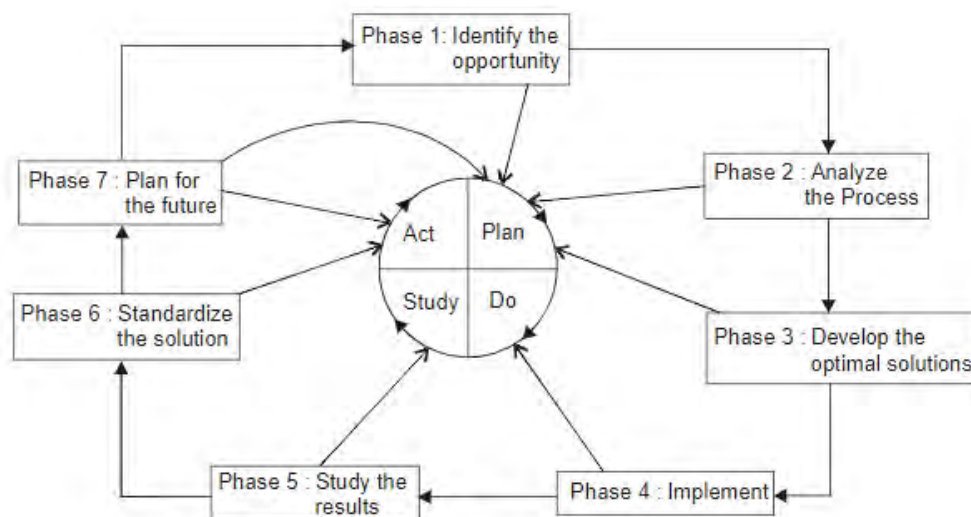
### Specialized Accreditation:

Special accreditation was developed in some professions (such as Accounting) because the public had concerns about the adequacy of education being delivered in preparation for a professional field of study (Millard, 1984). As a result, specialized accreditation is concerned with specific professional, occupational, or disciplinary areas within institutions or as free standing professional or occupational school (Millard, 1984). Specialized accreditation bodies require an institution to have institutional accreditation in order to be eligible for specialized accreditation. If an institution loses its institutional accreditation, it will also lose its specialized accreditation. Special accreditation is recognized as being reputable by the Department of Education.

### Theory:

The origin of quality stems from business. In the 1950s, Walter Shewhart developed the plan-do-study-act system that introduced cycles for strengthening quality and the system still influences the field. The plan-do-study-act chart below (Figure 6) illustrates the foundation of assessment processes in place of most higher learning institutions today. This movement expanded its focus from products and manufacturing, and entered the management and service sectors.





Source: N.R., Babu, & Rajengra, 2006  
Figure 6 – Plan-Do-Study-Act Chart

W. Edwards Deming was one of the most notable figures behind the total quality management movement after World War II. Deming developed a set of 14 guiding principles aimed at improving quality and productivity of organizations by holding management accountable within the organization. His philosophy demanded that all employees within an organization should be focused on satisfying the customer demands by providing high quality at a low cost. Deming focused on businesses but his strategies can be applied to higher education. Higher education witnessed a push for accountability as evidenced by the Higher Education Act and accreditation expectations. By raising the quality standards expected of an institution, this should raise the quality level of the students graduating from an institution. The quality of education received by students is connected to the dedication of administration, faculty and staff of the institution (Hughey, 2000). Employee involvement is at the roots of total quality management.

According to The Deming Institute (2018), Dr. Deming's 14 points for management are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 – 14 Principles for Management

1. Create constancy of purpose for improvement of product and service.
2. Adopt the new philosophy.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality.
4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute leadership.
8. Drive out fear.
9. Break down barriers between departments.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations and targets for the work force.
11. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship.

12. Remove barriers that rob people in management and in engineering of their right to pride of workmanship.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement.
14. The transformation is everybody's job.

According to Prasad (2017) and Hughey (2000), the Deming 14 points for management can be restated in the terms required for higher education. The restatement is as follows in Table 4.

Table 4 – 14 Principles for Higher Education

1. Create constancy of purpose towards improvement of students and service. Exceptional customer satisfaction will give the institution an advantage and benefits will carry forward into the future. Everyone in the organization must be on board with the mission of the university or college.
2. Adopt a new philosophy. What was acceptable in the past is no longer acceptable for the future. Students and their concerns should be upfront in every decision at the university or college.
3. Decrease the dependence on examination testing to achieve quality. Instead offer learning experiences designed to meet the education desired, which will create the quality education experience.
4. Work for the proper match of backgrounds, interest areas and the specialization chosen. Quality is not related to the large dollars being spent, instead a university or college should focus on the long term goals for the academic programs.
5. Improve constantly and forever to improve quality and productivity without increasing costs. Higher education should monitor the needs of students and offer services that will meet those needs. Continuous improvement should be a priority at universities or colleges.
6. Institute education and training on the job for administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Training is “key to the successful implementation of TQM within the academic environment” (Hughey, 2000).
7. Institute leadership. Upper leadership should reinforce their commitment to quality and empower those closest to students to make decisions.
8. Drive out fear by encouraging people to speak freely. Supervisors should not rely on formalized evaluations (i.e. peer-evaluations and self-evaluations) as a way to motivate employees to adhere to the departments' goals.
9. Break down barriers between different departments and increase cooperation among groups. Students should be of concern and improvements should be welcome by everyone, no matter of the originating department.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations and targets for faculty and students asking for a perfect performance and new levels of productivity. When administration sets unrealistic goals, employees become unmotivated, morale decreases and performance is hindered. Unrealistic goals, such as 100% student satisfaction, can lead to employee frustration and burnout.
11. Eliminate work standards on faculty and students. Holding individuals with different abilities to the same performance standards can be counterproductive.

12. Remove barriers that rob the faculty, management and students of their right pride and joy of workmanship. Higher education should be flexible in order to respond to individual needs for establishing priorities. Focus should be on quality instead of quantity.
13. Institute a vigorous program of learning and self-improvement for everyone. Total quality management can mean additional training for employees will be needed in order for the university or college to achieve customer satisfaction.
14. Put everybody in the institution to work to accomplish the transformation. The higher quality standards should be the efforts of all employees reaching for the same set of goals.

There can be no dispute that quality matters. Quality embraces all facets of higher education institutions, locally, regionally, and internationally. As evidenced, it is appropriate to utilize Dr. Deming's total quality management philosophy within higher education. Higher education could benefit from implementing Deming's 14 principles of management. The assessment process in the United States can provide the framework that higher education requires in order to ensure quality and enhance customer satisfaction. Variation in quality was thought by Dr. Deming as a disease that could threaten the survival of an organization. The more variation in the quality, the greater the threat. Accreditation can provide a method to ensure a minimum standard of quality is being achieved by institutions. Benchmarking against peer institutions can be seen as an opportunity for universities to freely share values, ideas, and practices (Prasad, 2017). "The Deming philosophy looks at the world through a lens that is different from all others" (The Deming Institute, 2018). It is a holistic approach to leadership and management that will benefit any organization, including higher education. "The end goal? To teach students how to think – not what to think, which is inherently a 21<sup>st</sup> century skill" (The Deming Institute, 2018).

### **Methodology and Analysis:**

A qualitative case study method was used in order to gather data surrounding the accreditation process and agencies in Vietnam and Japan. In order to understand accreditation within the higher education for Vietnam and Japan, personal interviews were conducted in Vietnam and Japan with faculty members, university department heads, higher administration personnel, or authoritative figures on accreditation within that country. For instance, the researchers had the honor to personally speak with several representative from National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education, Japan University Accreditation Association, Kobe University, Chiba Institute of Science, and University of Social Sciences and Humanities, among others. The researchers are very appreciative of the time, assistance, and superior hospitality during the lovely office visits. It was wonderful how all parties were able to accommodate their busy calendars in order to accommodate the researchers needs.

The researchers first sought approval from the university's IRB committee in order to conduct the research. The university's IRB granted its approval. A review of the literature was completed in order to gain a better understanding of the accreditation process within higher education for Vietnam and Japan. From that review of literature, the researchers identified some interview questions that they wished to have further clarification on. This led to the development of 16 questions related to the accreditation process and agencies; and 16 questions related to national accreditation. With the help of the researcher's contacts, personal interviews were arranged during the researcher's visits to Vietnam and Japan. The interview questions were translated into Japanese language and sent ahead of time to some of the Japanese contacts. An interpreter was available during the Japanese interviews. The interview questions were not translated into Vietnamese language because the contacts could read and speak English. Interviewing the representatives allowed the researchers to confirm and clarify facts found with the review of literature.

A case study was used in order to gather real-life background to provide meaningful evidence as to the accreditation process within higher education in Vietnam and Japan. The preparation in which every organization engaged to; not only arrange such a superb presentation

for each of the visits; but also, preparing so intensely for the time together by compiling the invaluable handouts was deeply appreciated. Each organization's diligent preparation allowed us to cover a lot of ground in such a short period of time. The researchers learned so much from each meeting and conversation. The interviews were transcribed and read several times in order to compare and contrast the information shared from the interviewees. The data is documented in a research journal and is supported with the literature review in order to validate the research findings.

## **VIETNAM**

### **Context:**

In the period before the French rule, the wealthy residents of the Vietnamese society invited teachers to reside in their houses in order to educate their children. The children of the nobles were sent to schools to study how to become a mandarin (civil administrator). The teachers were one form of mandarin. After Vietnam received its independence from China in 938, Vietnam would setup its own examination system for civil administrators. In 1075, Vietnam had its first exam designed for the civil administrators (Kinh & Chi, 2008). For the next 1,000 years, the Vietnamese people learned Chinese for writing, with a slight variation in the way words were pronounced (Kinh & Chi, 2008). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French colonized Vietnam and Indochina. The education system that Vietnamese people underwent was replaced by French-Vietnamese. Under this system, French became the dominant language and the language of instruction within higher education. As a result of the French dominance, 95 percent of Vietnamese people became illiterate (Kinh & Chi, 2008).

In 1917, France reformed Vietnam's educational system to mirror that of the French, which was a professional (vocational) education or a command education system. The educational system was primarily a mechanism to train students to serve the colonial system. In 1945, the Vietnamese government issued Decree No 17-SL: "Everyone in the country has to be literate" was issued in order to rehabilitate the country (Kinh & Chi, 2008). Vietnam's President Ho Chi Minh wanted to fight against illiteracy, invaders, and poverty while preserving its independence (Kinh & Chi, 2008). Within a year, Vietnam had about 75,000 literacy classes and 96,000 educators to assist the 2.5 million people in becoming literate (Kinh & Chi, 2008).

In 1950, the government declared that the Vietnamese language would be used in higher education instruction. Furthermore, some national fundamentals were being included within the curriculum. However, the French curriculum would continue to be used within the institutions in Northern Vietnam for a short period until 1954 or 1955, when the curriculum was changed with the Soviet Union influence. In Southern Vietnam, education transitioned from European and French influence towards that of North America. After 1975, South Vietnam began to nationalize private schools and remove the religious influence on the schools.

### **Educational Reform:**

The second educational reform occurred after peace was achieved in Northern Vietnam. The Vietnamese government desired "people who had all-round development in all aspects, and were good citizens and officials" and provided "linkages between theory and practice, and school and social life" (Kinh & Chi, 2008). The educational system became a 10-year program and resembled the educational system of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The professional educational system was dominant in North Vietnam (Le & Nguyen, 2009). In Southern Vietnam, the North America educational systems was an influencer. Education consisted of 12 year curriculum, with many subject areas, such as administration, economy, laws, and science (Kinh & Chi, 2008).

After the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976, the French presence left the Vietnam educational system and higher education in Vietnam began to be modeled after the Soviet Union. This would be the third educational reform within Vietnam. Education was transformed

into a 12-year general education and a few specialized universities were developed (Kinh & Chi, 2008). Government wanted to focus education towards developing an all-round individual, instead of a military (command) education. Universities under the Soviet Union model began to become highly specialized in professional studies while research was conducted at research universities (London, 2006). The biggest challenge in reforming the educational system was the lack of financial resources and graduate's inability to find suitable employment. There was a need in Vietnam for higher quality and improved training that meets employer needs. The mismatch between training and employer needs created high levels of under-employment in Vietnam (Dao, 2015).

### **National System:**

In 1993, the Soviet Union model of small specialized colleges was abandoned, and the government moved to a unified national system of large, comprehensive, research orientated universities (Harman et al., 2010). The five major universities were located in Danang, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, and Thai-Nguyen (Kinh & Chi, 2008). The reform permitted higher institutions to charge tuition, with strict limitations, and the reform created semi-public and non-public institutions. Semi-Public institutions are State owned, whereas Non-Public are community owned and privately owned (Harman et al., 2010). The training programs became diverse and were being developed so that graduates would be able to find suitable employment.

The Ministry of Education and Training would require higher institutions to continuously screen students during their entire college education experience. As a result, two national quality centers were developed in the 1990's: Vietnam National University Hanoi and Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (Le & Nguyen, 2009). In 2013, the two national university locations were considered as key locations because they accounted for 67 percent of student enrollment (Dao, 2015). In 2015, a third quality center regionally located at Danang University was established (Do et al., 2017). Followed by Thai Nguyen University and Vinh University joining regionally. According to Circular 61/2012/TT-BGDĐT, the three national agencies and two regional agencies should be independent of the higher education institutions.

In 2002, the Ministry of Education and Training implemented a policy called "Three Things in Common", which called for institutions to use common exam items, common organization of exams, and common use of exam results for admission (Tran et al., 2011). The intent of the three things in common policy was to standardize admission entrance into higher education thereby providing equal access to higher education for the citizens. Graduating high school students would enroll into cram sessions to prepare for the demanding college entrance exams. These stressful college entrance exams were discontinued in 2015 in order lower costs for universities and students.

Today, the college entrance exam is incorporated into the secondary graduation exam. The secondary graduation exam includes five testing areas: foreign language, mathematics, natural science, social science, and Vietnamese language. Students wishing to attend college will take a minimum of four testing exams, whereas three testing exams are needed for secondary graduation. The minimum college entrance score is established by Ministry of Education and Training to be 15 out of 30 in three testing areas. After 2020, admission exams will be abolished, and college admission will be based upon how well a student performs during his/her senior year of high school. Today, some prestigious universities have developed its own admission exam to become more selective in the admission process. Recently universities have been developing competence-based testing based upon the U.S. Scholastic Assessment Test and the U.K. Thinking Skills Assessment.

### **Quality Assurance System:**

Today, total independence is almost achieved, and most of the quality assurance system is financially independent. Additionally, licensure and public provision of data is also in place within the quality assurance program in Vietnam. Circular 08/2011/TT-BGDĐT specified the

requirements for quality assurance at higher education institutions. Requirements included minimum campus area, equipment resources, facilities, quantity and qualifications of full-time teaching staff, library resources, and teacher-student ratio to name a few (Do et al., 2017). If a university or program does not meet the minimum requirements, it could be closed. Vietnam is experiencing a large influx of students into its institutions of higher learning. The growth is expected to continue, and as a result, quality of education has been highlighted (Maddison, 2014). The government predicts that by 2020, enrollment could be 4.5 million students, which represents 99 percent increase from 2013 (2.26 million students) (Dao, 2015).

The quality assurance system in Vietnam is modeled after other institutions in Asia and Europe. Vietnam's model of quality assurance include accrediting agencies, external quality assurance and internal quality assurance. The government has developed a legal framework for the quality assurance system. The State management includes the evaluation standards, procedures and cycles of accreditation, establishment and operation of the accrediting agencies (Nguyen et al., 2017). The government assigns the Ministry of Education and Training to be in charge of maintaining and supervising accrediting activities. A subunit of the Ministry, the General Department of Education Testing and Accreditation, is responsible for guiding the individuals, institutions, and organizations to implement quality assurance programs (Nguyen et al., 2017).

Established by the Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam has five accrediting agencies. The five agencies are: Center for Education Accreditation – Vietnam National University (Hanoi), Center for Educational Accreditation – Vietnam University (Ho Chi Minh City), Center for Education Accreditation – Da Nang University, Center for Education Accreditation of the Association of Vietnam Universities and Colleges; and Center for Educational Accreditation – Vinh University (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019). These five agencies are granted authorization by the Ministry of Education to conduct accreditation in Vietnam. Additional agencies could be developed in the future to undertake the external quality assessment. The expansion is because of the volume of institutions (over 700 campuses and over 1,000 programs) that will be expected to be reviewed for accreditation (Nguyen et al., 2017).

Most Vietnamese institutions have established an internal quality assurance division. The internal division reviews quality assurance behaviors within the institution. In 2012, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education revealed that the institutions' internal assessment division was intensely involved in: building and managing a testing bank center; collaborating to organize exams; collecting feedback from employers, graduates and students; conducting institutional and program self-evaluation; developing guidelines for internal quality assurance; evaluating teaching activities; among other various activities (Nguyen et al., 2017). Vietnam has established a new accreditation and quality assurance procedure and is heading towards a national qualification framework that is aligned with ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework on a region-wide basis for ASEAN members. The ten ASEAN members consist of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2018). Vietnam institutions clearly demonstrate the importance of accreditation and quality assurance within the educational system.

## **JAPAN**

### **Context:**

Modern Japanese schools began in 1872 after the governments' declaration of the Educational System. The fundamental law of education and the school education law were enacted in 1947 to ensure equal opportunities for citizens in education (NIAD-UE, 2014). Accreditation of universities in Japan began after World War II and continues yet today. Japan is known to have the oldest accreditation system in Asia. The Japanese system of accreditation was formed after the United States educational system, with the exception that Japanese accreditation is controlled by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education supervises the curriculum, textbook, and classes in order to provide a uniform standard of education. Students are expected to work in groups, and they are responsible for keeping the classrooms, cafeterias, etc. clean. This work responsibility teaches students to work in groups and to be respectful of each other's work. Almost all students wear school uniforms in order to remove the social barriers. Universities are required to be endorsed every 7 years, with the reaffirmation process performed by an accreditation body recognized by the Ministry of Education. Professional programs need to be endorsed every 5 years. The term *Daigaku*, which means "university" or "college" can only be used by institutions licensed by the Ministry of Education (Mori, 2009).

### **Accreditation Agency:**

In 1947, Japan's first accreditation agency was formed, the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) (Mori, 2009). Japan formed its higher education system after the United States educational system for quality assurance. JUAA has "functioned as a driving force of quality enhancement of Japanese higher education" (Mori, 2009). However, even though the Japanese system was designed after the United States, accreditation in JUAA is very selective. According to Mori (2009), institutions accredited by JUAA have met beyond a minimum standard for membership and a university is deemed an emblem of excellence to have JUAA accreditation. The Japanese government plays a role in the quality of higher education, and the licensing of institutions, which is common for European universities (Mori, 2009).

The Ministry of Education evaluates an institution, it licenses the institution and it limits the number of students admitted into the institutions. Public schools have enrollment mandated and private schools enrollment is suggested. The Japanese strategy to improve the quality of higher education is to admit fewer students, which therefore meant that students would be of a higher quality entering into the educational system. Graduating high school students would enroll into cram sessions to prepare for the demanding college entrance exams. The Ministry of Education conducts the initial application for institutional licensure. After licensure, the institutions self-regulate the quality of the curriculum, teaching and research (Mori, 2009). Temple University of Japan started in Tokyo in 1982, along with other U.S. universities. Temple University is the only foreign university that remains in Japan. Until 2005, Temple University was not recognized as a university in Japan. The lack of official recognition created various challenges, such as graduation school applications, VISA issuance for foreign students, and etc. Temple University is now recognized by the Ministry of Education as a Japan branch of a foreign university. The official recognition permits Temple University to sponsor student VISAs, etc. Accreditation is important!

In 1987, the Ministry of Education created the Council for Higher Education (NIAD-UE, 2014). The Council for Higher Education conducts reviews of the entire education system. The Council of Higher Education made several recommendations, including the establishment of new degree awarding organizations. In 1991, the National Institution for Academic Degrees (NIAD) emerged under the direction of the Ministry of Education. NIAD was established to "confer academic degrees to learners outside the university on the basis of matriculation and recognition of educational institutions outside the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education" (Mori, 2009). In 2000, the NIAD was reorganized as the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE). Higher education accreditation was the purpose of this new committee and it is under the guidance of the government. Today, three accreditation bodies exist in Japan. Those bodies are: Japan Institution for Higher Education Evaluation (JIHEE), Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA), and National Institutional for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) (Ramadan et al., 2013). NIAD-UE merged in 2016 with Center for National University Finance and Management (CUFM) and was renamed NIAD-QE.

In order to ensure quality within the educational system, the Ministry encouraged institutions to complete a self-evaluation of its quality (in 1991), which later became mandatory (in 1999), and then stipulated by law (in 2004) (Higher Education Bureau, 2018). Each Japanese higher educational institution develops its own guidelines for academic assessment. As of 2018,

there were 1,113 universities, 57 college of technology, 2,776 professional training colleges, and 3 educational institutions operated by government ministries and agencies (NIAD-QE, 2020). As of 2020, there are three university accreditation bodies in Japan: JUAA, NIAD-QE, and JIHEE. JIHEE was created in 2004 by a group of private educational institutions. These three accreditation organizations (JUAA, NIAD-QE and JIHEE) have additional responsibilities which includes the accreditation of special fields. Universities are permitted to seek foreign accreditation, when a domestic accreditation does not exist. Since institutions do not pay a membership fee to an accreditation agency, Japanese universities can seek reaccreditation from any of the three accreditation agencies, because the three agencies are under the control of the government.

### **Conclusion:**

Although the quality movement is relatively “young” in the history of higher education, its footprint is significant and persistent. Higher education institutions must relentlessly create, review, and renew their systems of quality assurance in their endeavors to ensure relevance, marketability, reliability, and stature. As the internationalization and massification of higher education flourishes, higher education institutions must also be prepared to meet both domestic and global quality standards and expectations. Academic quality is essential to an institution’s wellbeing, resilience, and sustainability. Decades of quality studies generally focused on product quality, such as W. Edwards Deming. Defining quality in the context of providing a service and as a managerial responsibility are rather new concepts. This paper concentrated on obtaining an understanding of the development of higher education, accreditation and quality assurance systems in the United States, Vietnam, and Japan. An educational curriculum was seen to be a pillar needed for growth for each country. It became apparent that all three countries realize the importance of quality and are heavily involved in the assessment process. There are some differences in who controls the curriculum and the assessment process. However, the final quality outcomes are universally shared among the three countries.

Some potential research areas for investigating would include looking more deeply into the accreditation process for the United States, Vietnam, and Japan. Additionally, exploring the quality assurance regulations for establishing a university or program (such as traditional live verses distance learning) would be of interest to further our understanding such a complex task. There are many emerging themes that could be brought into research as well. Themes such as 21<sup>st</sup> century skill set needed, lifelong learning, transparency and accountability, and development of international quality assurance standards. Further research studies could have a significant influence on the development of quality assurance.



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