

Higher Education Challenges in Developing Countries: The Case of Vietnam

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Abstract: This review of literature was written in preparation for conducting a research study on the U.S. community college system as a potential model for developing countries, and using Vietnam as a specific case. It is divided into four sections: (a) a discussion of the purposes of higher education (HE), (b) an examination of problems faced by the HE systems in developing countries, (c) a description of Vietnam's HE context, and (d) perspectives concerning U.S. community colleges. The literature shows that problems experienced across developing countries are representative of those faced by higher education in Vietnam. Inadequate access, funding, teacher salaries and qualifications, pedagogical materials, facility conditions, institutional autonomy, and quality assurance mechanisms are all difficult issues that must be addressed. Recommendations are discussed as thematic concepts, including diversification, establishing links between industry and HE institutions, and providing access to adult learners.

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International Journal of Educational Policy, Research, & Practice, Volume 5, Number 2, Summer 2004.
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model for developing countries, and using Vietnam as a specific case. It is divided into four sections: (a) a discussion of the purposes of higher education (HE), (b) an examination of problems faced by the HE systems in developing countries, (c) a description of Vietnam's HE context, and (d) perspectives concerning U.S. community colleges.

Although literature reviews normally include an assessment of prior research on and around the researcher's topic, the absence of such studies precluded using this approach. The lack of published research may be attributed to three circumstances. First, "in the poorest countries, few if any, universities or other institutions exist with research capabilities in education. . . . Under such conditions, research information is not a priority in education management" (Adams, Kee, & Lin, 2001, p. 221). Second, Sloper and Can (1995) confirmed "remarkably little has been published internationally about higher education in Vietnam" (p.3). Finally, based upon the researcher's review of articles, and discussions with U.S. community college professionals who have some experience in Vietnam, the focus of visiting U.S. experts has been on the feasibility of implementing a U.S. community college model, not on researching its suitability for Vietnam.

Developing Countries and Higher Education

The purpose of this section is to gain an understanding of the context in which a U.S. community college model would have to operate were it in a developing country. The primary focus is on identifying and analyzing problems experienced in the higher education sector of developing countries and to present some conceptual remedies. But it seems prudent to evaluate first the fundamental and sometimes contentious question of "why higher education" when developing countries have not yet met their needs for primary and secondary education?

The purpose of HE

The World Bank, Organization of Economic Cooperation (OECD), United Nations, and other major donors view HE through the lens of human capital theory (Spring, 1998). According to Karabel and Halsey (1977), human capital theory has a "direct appeal to pro-capitalist ideological sentiment that resides in its insistence that the worker is a *holder of capital* (as embodied in his skills and knowledge) and that he has the capacity to invest (in himself)" (p. 13). This theory appeals to developing countries as it is connected with receipt of funding but also because it holds "promise to support economic growth through the one

resource in which these countries have confidence, the latent talents and intellectual abilities of their people” (Oliver, 2004, p. 120).

Yet higher education is not just a matter of economics, as extensive reading of World Bank publications might lead one to think. Ransom, Khoo, and Selvaratnam (1993) seem sensitive to this issue: “The central point about HE is that unlike other forms of capital, it transcends mere economic returns” (p. 2). The Communist Party of Vietnam’s (CPV) Sixth National Congress in 1986 described other socializing objectives for higher education: “moral qualities . . . defined as upholding positive attitudes toward socialism, developing decent perspectives on self-perfection and social progress, acquiring academic potential for life-long learning and developing capabilities to access employment” (Doan, 2000, p. 27). Edward Shils (1982) thought that the primary task of universities “is the methodological discovery of and teaching of truths about serious and important things” (p. 3). Bok (1990) emphasizes the importance of teaching moral education through applied ethics.

For Vietnam in contrast to many other developing countries, Confucian philosophy strongly influences the way that society views education. For Confucius, “knowledge was held as an indispensable treasure. The knowledge which he taught to be pursued was not purely scientific learning, but was the study of sacred texts and the rules of virtue and propriety (Shinn, 1997, p. 3). One of the five obligations was *Tri*, the duty to become educated (Pham, 1994). “Vietnamese teachers are expected to be people who transfer knowledge but also those who provide moral training” (Nguyen, 2003, p. 23). “The Vietnamese, like people in most Asian cultures, consider education as the most reliable path to a successful life” (Nguyen, 2003, p. 18). In her research concerning Vietnamese conceptualizations of quality in HE, Nguyen (2003) found that university faculty and students agreed it was “meeting the requirements of society. . . . creativity, good professional skills, and readiness to be useful to the society by contributing to the development of the country . . . and the people” (p. 190). Students also stressed that the knowledge and skills taught must be relevant to “real life” (Nguyen, 2003, p. 190).

In summary, nonquantifiable objectives are expressed in different words across countries, similar concepts are found within education systems internationally. Schools are socializing institutions, “education has multiple essential missions, and human capital theory only focuses on one of them to the exclusion of the rest” (Oliver, 2004, p. 126).

The Problems

A dramatic increase in demand and enrollments over the past 40 years is one of the most pressing problems experienced by higher

education in developing countries: “Resources, both public and private, have not kept pace with escalating enrollments and costs” (Ransom, Khoo, & Selvaratnam, 1993, p.1). “In 1995 more than 47 million students were enrolled in higher education in the developing world, up from nearly 28 million in 1980” (The Task Force, 2000, p. 27).

The World Bank (1994) establishes four categories that facilitate analysis of higher education problems found in developing countries: (a) severe resource constraints, (b) internal efficiencies, (c) external efficiencies, and (d) social equity. The problems identified by the World Bank under each of these categories are representative of discussions across the literature on this subject.

With regard to resource constraints, the World Bank (1994) reports that “adverse macroeconomic conditions and increased competition for scarce public funds have reduced many governments’ capacity to support higher education and public expenditures for higher education have fallen” (p. 16). Staffing problems have resulted from low salaries that cause teachers either to leave the profession or work additional jobs, which compete for the teachers’ time and often detract from the quality of education provided to their students (Lim, 1999). A second significant problem is faculty qualifications: “Unfortunately, even at flagship universities in developing countries, many faculty members have little, if any, graduate level training” (The Task Force, 2000, p. 23). Teaching methods primarily depend upon lecturing and writing notes on the chalkboard, which the students copy into their notebooks (The Task Force, 2000). Normally students cannot afford to buy textbooks and only a small number of copies are available for use by students in the library.

Deterioration of the infrastructure is another resource constraint problem. The World Bank (1994) report found that overcrowded conditions common to higher education institutions in developing countries force managers to focus on the cost of meeting operating requirements and they often lack sufficient funds to address facility maintenance needs (World Bank, 1994, p. 19).

The second category, internal efficiencies, includes issues associated with institution size and student to teacher ratios. In some countries, rapid enrollment increases have resulted in a “proliferation of uneconomically small, specialized institutions characterized by high unit costs and significant duplication in their program offerings” (World Bank, 1994, p. 19). According to a 1986 study, the unit costs were at least 50% higher for institutions with enrollments of less than 4,000 students (World Bank 1994). There are also three other factors that increase costs per graduating student: (a) low student to staff ratios, (b) high dropout rates, and (c) high course repetition rates.

According to the World Bank (1994), “two types of external efficiency affect the higher education systems of developing countries: graduate unemployment and declining research output” (p. 28). There are various dimensions to the graduate unemployment problem including “the production of graduates whose skills and specializations do not reflect those needed in the labor market” (Ransom, Khoo, & Selvaratnam, 1993, p. 1). One important aspect of the unemployment problem is the lack of established links between industry and higher education institutions. Ransom, Khoo, and Selvaratnam (1993) point to the paradoxical situation where engineering and science graduates are unemployed because “there are not enough skills in the general labor force to stimulate the creation of firms in the technology fields to generate more jobs in these areas” (p. 17).

Lim (1999) also argues that “in developing countries there are often significant political intervention in the affairs of universities, with much less academic freedom for staff and students of the type treasured in universities in developed countries” (p. 4). Lim sites Vietnam as an example: “Political interference makes the search for truth, especially in the social sciences, unattractive, and promotion by political or social connection discourages the pursuit of excellence in teaching and research” (p. 5).

Problems in research output in developing countries can be traced to shortages in physical infrastructure, laboratory equipment, computers and software, learning resources including textbooks and journals, and “well qualified science and technology teachers and researchers” (The Task Force, 2000, p. 73). The “brain drain” is also a part of this problem: “Estimates indicate that about one-third of foreign students studying in the United States do not return to their countries” (The Task Force, 2000, p. 73).

Equity often generates a tension with equality in access policies (Ransom, Khoo & Selvaratnam, 1993, p. 5). The World Bank (1994) found that “the rapid growth of enrollments has led to increased access to higher education for traditionally less privileged populations, including women and students of rural origin” (p. 22). “However, higher education is still very elitist” (World Bank, 1994, p. 23).

Recommended Remedies

The Task Force (2000) has numerous recommendations for addressing the problems found in developing countries. There is a need to improve the infrastructure and to raise the quality of secondary education. The Task Force says that countries will have to come up with additional funding for these efforts, but the investment will also attract

help from outside sources. The Task Force stresses the importance of improving institutional governance: "We believe that poor management is often the single greatest obstacle to stronger higher education" (p. 95).

The World Bank's (1994) report emphasizes the importance of diversifying the types of institutions available in the higher education sector. This report found a direct correlation between the degree of diversification and the country's income; lower income countries tend to be public university based. Ransom, Khoo, and Selvaratnam (1993) argue that "structural diversity has made it possible to expand access to HE, to respond to the demand for different types of HE by different social groups. . . , and to provide HE that recognizes and reacts to labor market signals" (p. 6). The Task Force (2000) states that "the labor market. . . creates a demand for graduates who have undergone training of different types and intensities" (p. 32).

In the case of countries in Eastern and Central Europe, as well as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, there is a need to continue consolidation of the small, specialized, independent institutions that report to numerous different government entities. During recent years the trend has been toward some institutional consolidation, but in the interim research institutes and HEIs should work together since "education and research are two closely related elements in establishing knowledge" (UNESCO, 1998, p. 17).

"Higher education institutions should educate students to become well informed and deeply motivated citizens, who can think critically, analyze problems of society, look for solutions to the problems of society, apply them and accept social responsibilities" (UNESCO, 1998, p. 10). New curricula and teaching methods must be developed to nurture critical thinking and decision making skills across academic fields. Strong support for staff development in terms of policy and commitment of funding are also essential.

Another important aspect of diversification refers to funding. World-wide spending on higher education is estimated to be around USD \$300 billion (Task Force, 2000). "Nearly one-third of this expenditure is in developing countries and, with developing country systems heavily dominated by public universities that tend to have low tuition fees, the costs fall predominantly on the state" (Task Force, 2000, p. 54). Many developing countries have implemented cost sharing through tuition fees. Income generating activities recommended by the World Bank (1994) include short courses, research, and consultant contracts. Also of importance to financial diversification are private higher education institutions. Private institutions comprise 70.3% of higher education

institutions in Indonesia and 75.2% in the Philippines (Cohen, 2001, p. A47).

The World Bank (1994) report has several recommendations that address ways in which higher education systems in developing countries can be more responsive to changes in economic requirements; these are specifically relevant to the roles of community colleges. The links between tertiary institutions and the commercial sector can be developed “through the participation of [employer] representatives in the governance of institutions, the increased use of domestic and international apprenticeship, work-study opportunities. . . , the exchange of personnel between the world of work and higher education institutions and revised curricula” (UNESCO, 1998, p. 9). The adoption of financial incentives is recommended to nurture industry-higher education institution joint efforts, such as research, internships, and adjunct part time faculty comprised of practicing professionals. “Continuing education programs are also an effective channel to respond to changing training requirements” (World Bank, 1994, p. 11).

Two additional elements that require greater attention are gender equity and access by adult learners. UNESCO’s (1998) World Declaration on Higher Education states that it is essential to “remove gender inequalities and biases in curricula and research and take all appropriate measures to ensure balanced representation of both men and women among students and teachers, at all levels of management” (p. 21). With regard to adult learners, UNESCO recommends the development of “mechanisms to recognize the outcomes of learning undertaken in different contexts, and to ensure that credit is transferable within and between institutions, sectors, and states” (p. 21). This latter recommendation is a tremendous challenge even within industrialized countries, like the U.S.. Yet, the establishment of articulation agreements has proven to be effective with the U.S. community college model (Sotello & Turner, 1994).

Vietnam shares many of the problems previously described. To understand more fully how these problems and some of the recommended solutions operate in a developing country, Vietnam’s higher education system, the challenges it faces, and corrective measures that the government has already taken will be examined.

Vietnam’s Higher Education System

Vietnam has developed rapidly during the last decade of the 20th century going from a population of 70 million in 1991 (Nguyen, 1994) to 80 million in 1999, and from a per capita income of \$200 per year in 1992 to \$390 in 1999 (Kelly, 2000). The higher education system has been

through many transitions and continues with the reform process today. These changes have been a challenge for managers of the HEIs.

An Overview

Vietnam's HE system today is exhibiting dramatic growth: "Between 1993 and 1995, total higher education enrollments grew by 117% (from 162,000 to 354,000), while expenditures grew by 63%" (The World Bank, 1998, p. 1). Between 1995 and 1997, student enrollments at the universities doubled (Kelly, 2000). "Given that more than 65 percent of Vietnam's 80 million residents are younger than 26, these numbers are expected to continue growing" (Kelly, 2000, p. 3). The HE system also has become relatively diversified. A restructuring began in 1993 resulting in the consolidation of several independent public institutions into two multidisciplinary national and three regional universities, as well as the establishment of two Open Universities (Postiglione & Mak, 1997).

By the 1997 to 1998 academic year, Vietnam's higher education system was comprised of "121 universities and colleges consist[ing] of 42 public higher education institutions, 15 people-established institutions, 63 [public] junior colleges and 1 people-established one" (MOET, 2000, p. 39). Semi-public institutions are established by the state with investments from social and political organizations as well as individuals. People-founded institutions are "owned and managed by non-government organizations or private associations such as trade unions [and] cooperatives" (World Bank, 1997, p. 33). However, half of the universities and colleges, and a majority of the jobs are in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City while 76% of the population lives in the rural areas (Kelly, 2000). Many of the colleges and junior colleges are administratively managed by provincial governments, offer 3 year courses, and present diplomas. At least two thirds of these institutions are solely for training elementary and middle school teachers.

Diversification also applies to HE students who are divided into five categories: (a) regular full-time, (b) short-term training, (c) specialized or retraining, (d) in-service training, and (e) other (World Bank, 1997). Full-time students comprise the largest percentage, but the number has been declining in relative terms (World Bank, 1997).

Tran (2002) explains how social equality is assured through a diversified education system: "Naturally, all people cannot be equal in terms of ability. Each individual has, however, his/her specific ability which should be developed: and a progressive society must create equal opportunities to do so" (p. 43). The ability to succeed in a university is first measured by a competitive national entrance exam which, using Can Tho University as an example, "eliminates 85 to 90 percent of the applicants

[and] candidates living in isolated areas have little opportunity to study at university entrance examination preparation centers that operate in the big cities” (Tran & Slopper, 1995, p. 214). Tran (2002) goes on to say that the topography of Vietnam is also diverse and “each region has specific features and objectives which should be placed within the overall socio-economic frame of the country. It is, therefore, critical to diversify education and human resource development to attain the set objectives” in relation to local requirements (p. 47).

Although diversification of institutions and students is considered to be one viable approach to solving the access problem, Vietnam’s situation reveals some diversification related problems. Doan (2000) argues “it is the diversity of educational programmes and their uneven standards that has created a confusing range of qualifications. This issue has so far, confused the public and prospective employers” (p. 37). She also states that it has made the task of defining graduate program admission criteria extremely difficult.

“The Ministry of Education and Training is responsible for policy making, guidance, and supervision in connection with all the education programs and the administration of the higher education institutions” (Postiglione & Mak, 1997, p. 363). Although the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has this major role, many institutions also come under other ministries. “With regard to course organization, the Ministry of Education and Training approves new courses and the education programs, develops the examination statutes, and confers degrees” (Postiglione & Mak, 1997, p. 365). MOET also reviews and authorizes the publication of textbooks, formulates enrollment regulations, and funds the fixed institutional expenses, such as maintenance and salaries. MOET and the Ministry of Finance (MOF) periodically issue guidelines concerning the range for fees that institutions are permitted to charge.

Categories of students who receive complete fee exemptions are war invalids, orphans, and students of exceptional academic ability (World Bank, 1997). There are also fee reductions for certain ethnic minorities as well as the children of military personnel and civil servants. However the Vietnam Education Financing Sector Study (VEFSS) shows that the education gap between the richest and poorest increases as one moves upward through the grade levels: “The richest 20 percent account for more than half of all those enrolled in upper secondary and tertiary education” (World Bank, 1997, p. 112).

Issues Faced by Vietnam’s Higher Education System

Kelly (2000) identifies access as one of the most critical problems facing Vietnam’s higher education institutions now and into the future.

MOET (2000) states that “the Vietnamese Communist Party and Government consider education and training as their first priority among national policies” (p. 33). With this strongly stated commitment and Vietnam’s “historical reverence for education, the high level of demand for tertiary education, and a growing population that adds up to 2 million new students each year will continue to exert pressure on the tertiary system” (Kelly, 2000, p. 5). “This year (2001-02) MOET estimates that university and college enrollments will exceed 160,000, an increase of more than 13,000 from last year” (IIE, 2001, p. 5).

During interviews at Hue University, in the central region of Vietnam, Berlie (1993) identified six areas of “special concern” in the higher education system: (a) the budget, (b) the programs, (c) the reorganization of higher education, (d) the teachers, (e) the study of foreign languages, and (f) the difficulties graduates experience in finding employment (p. 44). The funding of higher education does not seem to be increasing and may even be on the decline. Vietnam’s education system has heavily emphasized the theoretical, but as the economy becomes more market based, the practical aspects of education must be integrated into the curriculum. Berlie (1993) describes the serious problem of low faculty pay that makes it impossible for teachers to support their families without additional employment. In 1993, professors received a salary increase and their earnings rose to USD \$20 per month (Pham & Sloper, 1995). Today, university faculty salaries range between USD \$30 and \$70 per month. In the area of employment, “the Faculty of Medicine of Ho Chi Minh City admitted that half of the students cannot find work on graduation” (Berlie, 1993, p. 44). Part of the unemployment problem stems from low wages and inadequate resources in provincial areas, causing graduates to seek jobs in the large, crowded cities.

Dang (1998) also discusses issues facing Vietnam’s higher education system. He says the “quality of education is still low. Most university graduates do not have the adequate capacity to cope with rapid industrial and technological changes” (Dang, 1998, p. 157). Children of poor families still do not have equal access to continued education (Dang, 1998). There are not enough teachers and the number with graduate degrees is low. MOET (2000) reports professors and associate professors. . . occupy 5.7% of teaching staff and doctor and Ph.D. degree holders take 14% of total academics” (p. 39). The distribution of professors and associate professors tends to be uneven among the universities, with the greatest number residing in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. “For rural universities, most staff will have only a Bachelor degree” (Lim, 1999, p.3). Dang (1998) also argues that education management is generally weak. He emphasizes the need for a stronger connection between knowledge and skills. Sykes

(1996) describes the complex and paradoxical nature of change in Vietnam: “The new against the old, free market against government control, the prosperous against the devastatingly poor, semi-trucks side by side with ox carts” (p. 2).

U.S. Community Colleges

Open Access and Equity

The community college offers open access for high school graduates and people over the age of 18. Vaughan (1995) emphasizes the important relationship that comprehensiveness has with open access and equity. By offering programs not provided at other institutions of higher education, in addition to transfer programs, education opportunities were made available to millions of students who frequently had been ignored by colleges and universities. He also stresses that community colleges are community based, they provide education that meets the needs of their community. Yet U.S. community colleges have both advocates and critics.

To ensure the quality of graduates, students must meet certain qualifications for admission into specific programs, such as transfer. Remedial courses are offered to assist students in qualifying for the programs they prefer, but some critics say that the community college students are benignly manipulated into making other choices. Clark (1994) argues that there is a “cooling out function” where students are counseled out of their aspirations by a combination of pre-entrance testing that identifies inadequacies, required courses in self-evaluation and career planning, and an advisor who provides alternatives and objective data, such as grades, aptitudes, and interest tests that may help students to realign their objectives with a career nontransfer course (p. 40).

Theory, Interpretations, and Perspectives

The history of community colleges is complex because these institutions were a product of national, state, and local government policy as well as the varying social, economic, and political characteristics of states and local communities (Dougherty, 1994). To deal with this complexity, different paradigms, or theoretical lenses, have developed that significantly influence the interpretations and conclusions drawn by those who study, and advocate or criticize, the development as well as the impacts of community colleges. The arguments are connected to “three well-known theoretical schools in sociology and political science: ‘pluralist functionalism’ in the case of advocates; and ‘instrumentalist Marxism’ and ‘institutional theory’ in the case of the critics” (Dougherty, 1994, p.

16). Yet despite disagreements over the impact of community colleges on students, “the debaters implicitly agree that the community college has effectively met business demands for trained workers and elite state universities’ desire for a means to turn away less attractive students” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 16).

The advocates’ arguments that “the community college serves society by providing social mobility, job training, and protection for high quality universities—closely resembles functionalist theory in sociology” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 18). Cohen and Braver (1996) take this concept back to a specific characteristic of the U.S. national heritage: “Since its founding, the United States has been more dedicated to the belief that all individuals should have the opportunity to rise to their greatest potential . . . Institutions that enhance human growth should be created and supported” (p. 10). A contentious vocationalization movement began among community colleges as early as 1920, but did not accelerate until the 1970s (Cohen & Braver, 1996). The functionalists argued “that our economy has steadily eliminated unskilled jobs and created many new white-collar and skilled blue-collar occupations that require training falling between traditional college education and high school vocational education” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 30).

Brint and Karabel (1989) base their explanation of the vocationalization movement in community colleges on an “institutional model,” relating to “the classical sociological tradition . . . [that explains] processes of social change beyond the specific case of education” (p. 15). The essence of their argument is that community colleges were constrained “by their subordinate position in relation to that of the older and more prestigious four-year colleges and universities and, correspondingly, a subordinate position in the associated competition to place their graduates into desirable positions in the labor market” (Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 16).

The instrumentalist Marxist critics of community colleges view these institutions as instruments of a capitalist society that perpetuate suppression within the class structure (Brint & Karabel, 1989). These critics “accept the general Marxist tenet that our society is divided into separate and antagonistic social classes under the domination of the capitalist class (the corporate business elite)” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 20). The instrumentalist Marxist critics say that community colleges provide trained workers, at public expense, to support commercial capitalist enterprises. These critics also argue that community colleges cause students to stay in the working class and protect 4-year institutions, which favor the capitalist class (Dougherty, 1994). In summary, “the functionalist advocates see the community college as democratizing access to higher education, while the instrumentalist and institutional-

ist critics portray it as hampering attainment of the baccalaureate” (Dougherty, 1994, p. 21).

Interestingly, in an earlier research article by Dougherty (1988), he contends that both these arguments are inadequate to explain the expansion of community colleges in the U.S. He suggests that “government officials chose the community college because, among the institutions meeting the interest of powerful interest groups, it also met their own self interests” (p. 356). Labaree (1997) states that community colleges “have been subjected to intensive market pressures that shaped these institutions around competing concerns of employers (seeking productive workers) and consumers (seeking advantage in the struggle for social position)” (p. 191). He argues that trying to satisfy both has resulted in not effectively serving the goals of either.

With regard to how community college students and faculty view these institutions, this probably depends on their individual situations. Brint and Karabel (1989) argue that the students wish to be upwardly mobile but they are concerned about their abilities, anti-academic pressures from family, and market pressures. Jenkins (2003) states that lack of prestige, either perceived or actual, keeps many qualified candidates from applying for faculty positions. Yet he says that “in many areas, these institutions are the heart and soul of the community. . . . College faculty members . . . are often regarded as the most knowledgeable people around in their respective field” (Jenkins, 2003, ¶ 17). In an article titled “Professors Are Finding Better Pay and More Freedom at Community College,” Jacobsen (2003) counters the stereotypical view that “only lackluster Ph.D.s who can’t find jobs at four-year institutions aspire to teach at community colleges, with their heavy course loads and unprepared students” (¶ 1). She provides specific examples of Ph.D.s who have moved from universities and colleges to community colleges and found satisfaction.

In summary, the U.S. community colleges have critics but it is difficult to argue with the success of these HEIs as demonstrated by their rapid growth in both the number of institutions and students served as well as the increased opportunity they provide for all types of students to participate in HE and to fulfill a wide range of goals.

Conclusion

The literature shows that problems experienced across developing countries are representative of the challenges faced by higher education in Vietnam. Although Vietnam has made progress in implementing reform measures that have diversified funding and the higher education

institutional structure, the basic problems still persist and the growing social and economic demand for higher education necessitates consideration of new initiatives. The U.S. community college model is viewed differently depending upon one's theoretical lens but its success in the U.S. with regard to increasing access to HE across the social spectrum makes it worthy of examination by holding it up against Vietnam's context, particularly in the rural areas where education and job opportunities are limited.

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