

## **INCREASING THE GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS OF THE VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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**Abstract:** Higher education plays an important role in socio-economic development, national security and defence of Vietnam, and acts as an important factor in the global competitiveness of Vietnam. This article aims to analyze and assess the global competitiveness of the Vietnamese higher education through its ranking position in the regional and international higher education systems as well as its attractiveness to international students. Based on this, three solutions to increase the global competitiveness of the Vietnamese higher education system are proposed as follows include: (i) Improvement of the awareness of the global competitiveness in higher education; (ii) Determination of the vision on development of the Vietnamese competitiveness to improve the higher education system; (iii) Building the strategy to increase the competitiveness of the Vietnamese higher education system.

### **1. Introduction**

The main objective of higher education (HE) is to train a qualified human resource and to do scientific and technological research in order to create new knowledge and products meeting the demands on socio-economic development and national security and defence of the country. Thus, in recent years, the Vietnam Communist Party and the Government intentionally have given the leadership, directions, and priority in human resource to develop the HE. However, the growth of the Vietnamese HE has not yet met requirements and tasks for national development compared to a more and more fiercely global competitiveness as well as rapid changes in all fields derived from the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Parajuli, 2018). Therefore, the enhancement of the global competitiveness of the Vietnamese HE is an urgent and necessary task for international integration and the improvement of the position of Vietnam in the world.

### **2. Methods**

We applied three key research approaches including: Theoretical research which helps analyze and evaluate related documents to identify the nature of competitiveness in HE, based on which we determined two main factors of the global competitiveness of the Vietnamese HE for our research; Comparative research which aims to evaluate exactly the reality of the global competitiveness of the Vietnamese HE as a basis for solution suggestion; Survey on necessity and feasibility of the proposed solutions in order to increase the global competitiveness of the Vietnamese HE system (objects of the survey: 35 people including 05 education experts, 10 rectors and vice rectors and 20 managers of 05 universities).

### **3. Results**

#### ***3.1. Competitiveness of higher education system***

There are several concepts on competitiveness at the national, organizational and system levels. At national level, the concept by the World Economic Forum (WEF) is quoted as “competitiveness as the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of an economy, which in turn sets the level of prosperity that the economy can achieve” (WEF, 2017). Some models of analysis of competitiveness among countries were effectively carried out in reality, of which HE is a key element or a pillar and is ranked through different indicators. The competitiveness in HE is a fairly new phenomenon (Chirikov, 2016) so there is no comprehensive concept and completed model of analysis of the competitiveness among national HE systems. Thus, competitiveness among HE systems is considered and evaluated through key views as follows:

a) International student attractiveness (Choudaha, 2018; Hammond, 2016; Universities UK, 2014).

b) The total number of students out of the total population, the total number of students out of the total number of laborers, and subsidized amount given to each student from the Government (Kabók, Radišić, and Kuzmanović, 2016).

c) The Global Competitiveness Index of WEF (WEF, 2017) in which, HE is evaluated on the basis of eight elements including Secondary education enrollment rate; Tertiary education enrollment rate; Quality of the education system; Quality of math and science education; Quality of management schools; Internet access at schools; Local availability of specialized training services; Extent of staff training.

d) Rankings of HE systems and HE Institutions (HEIs) (Cabrera and Le Renard, 2015; Hazelkorn, 2014; Marginson, 2006; Rust and Kim, 2012).

Thus, the global competitiveness in HE is composed of several elements. We define global competitiveness in HE as the set of institutions, policies, and factors that determine the level of the quality of national HE. In this research, we concentrate on the quality of national HE exposed in two components: i) ranking position in regional and international HE; ii) attractiveness to international students.

#### ***3.2. Competitiveness of the Vietnamese Higher Education***

##### ***3.2.1. Ranking position of the Vietnamese Higher Education System***

According to HE System Strength Rankings 2018 of Quacquarelli Symonds (QS, 2018) and Ranking of National HE Systems 2019 of Universitas 21 (U21, 2019) - a global network of research-intensive universities, the Vietnamese HE system is not on the list of the top 50 of the best international HE systems while in South East Asian (SEA) region, five systems are ranked by QS and four systems by U21 (Table 1).

**Tab. 1:** Ranking results of HE systems in SEA by QS 2018 and U21 2019

Higher Education System:	Rank/50	
	QS	U21
Thailand	38	46
Malaysia	25	28
Singapore	28	07
Indonesia	39	50
Philippines	45	
Viet Nam		

Source: <https://www.topuniversities.com>; <https://universitas21.com>

According to The Global Competitiveness Report 2017-2018 of World Economic Forum (WEF, 2017), the Vietnamese HE system stands at the 84<sup>th</sup> position out of 137 systems, and at the 7<sup>th</sup> position in the SEA (Table 2).

**Tab. 2:** Ranking results of HE systems of 09 SEA countries by WEF

Country	Global competitiveness index in higher education and training		Global competitiveness index	
	Rank/137	Score	Rank/137	Score
Singapore	01	6.27	03	5.71
Malaysia	45	4.87	23	5.17
Philippines	55	4.59	56	4.35
Thailand	57	4.56	32	4.72
Indonesia	64	4.52	36	4.68
Brunei Darussalam	67	4.47	46	4.52
Viet Nam	84	4.07	55	4.36
Laos	105	3.47	98	3.91
Cambodia	124	2.88	94	3.93

Source: <https://www.weforum.org>

Besides, only two Vietnamese HEIs are ranked by QS World University Rankings 2019 (QS, 2019), but at low positions (Ho Chi Minh National University got the best position among Vietnamese Universities, at the ranking group from 701 to 750). No HEI is listed in the World University Rankings 2019 by Times Higher Education (THE, 2019) as well as by 2018 Academic Ranking of World Universities of Shanghai Jiao Tong University (ARWU, 2018; Table 3).

**Tab. 3: SEA Universities Ranked by THE and QS in 2019, by ARWU in 2018**

Country	Number of ranked universities				
	THE 2019		QS 2019		ARWU 2018
	World	Asia	World	Asia	World
Singapore	02	02	03	03	03
Malaysia	11	11	03	26	05
Thailand	14	14	08	19	04
Indonesia	05	05	09	22	00
Philippines	02	02	04	08	00
Viet Nam	00	00	02	07	00
Brunei Darussalam	00	00	02	02	00

Source: [https://www.timeshighereducation.com](https://www.timeshighereducation.com;);

[https://www.topuniversities.com](https://www.topuniversities.com;); <http://www.shanghairanking.com>

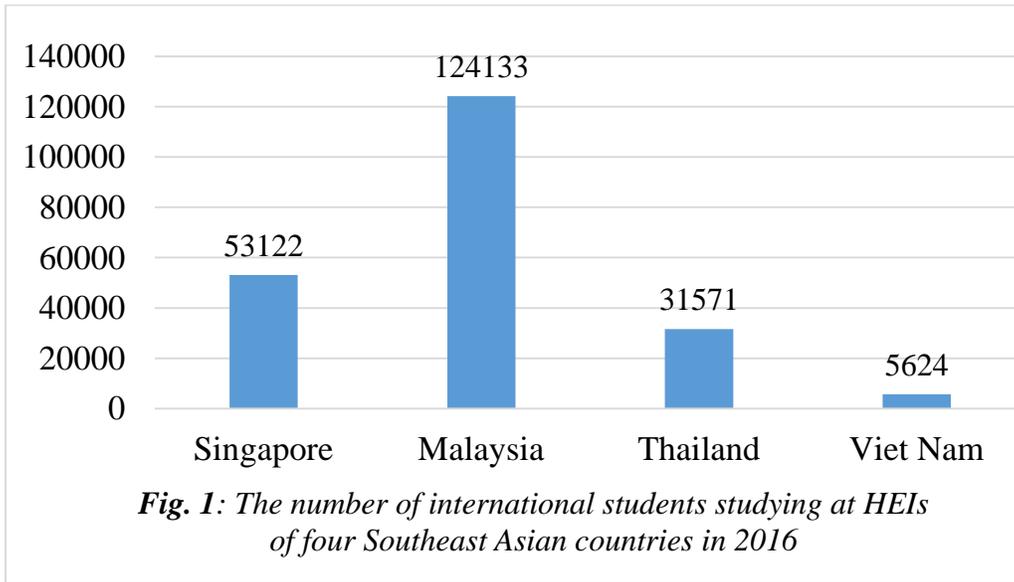
Note: Singapore National University and Nanyang University of Technology of Singapore got the highest ranking positions among SEA universities; the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and the University of Technology Brunei (UTB) stand at the 323<sup>rd</sup> and the 442<sup>nd</sup> positions in the world consecutively.

Thus, it can be affirmed that the ranking position of the Vietnamese HE system is still very low.

### *3.2.2. Attractiveness to international students by the Vietnamese higher education system*

Up to now, Vietnam has not been listed in any ranking tables of education ranking organizations or famous international magazines as one of the best countries for international students, while in SEA region, both Malaysia and Singapore have gained high positions. In the list of the best 100 cities in the world for international students evaluated by QS (QS, 2018), no city of Vietnam is ranked whilst Singapore stands at the 15<sup>th</sup> position, Kuala Lumpur at the 37<sup>th</sup>, Bangkok at the 54<sup>th</sup> and Manila at the 95<sup>th</sup>.

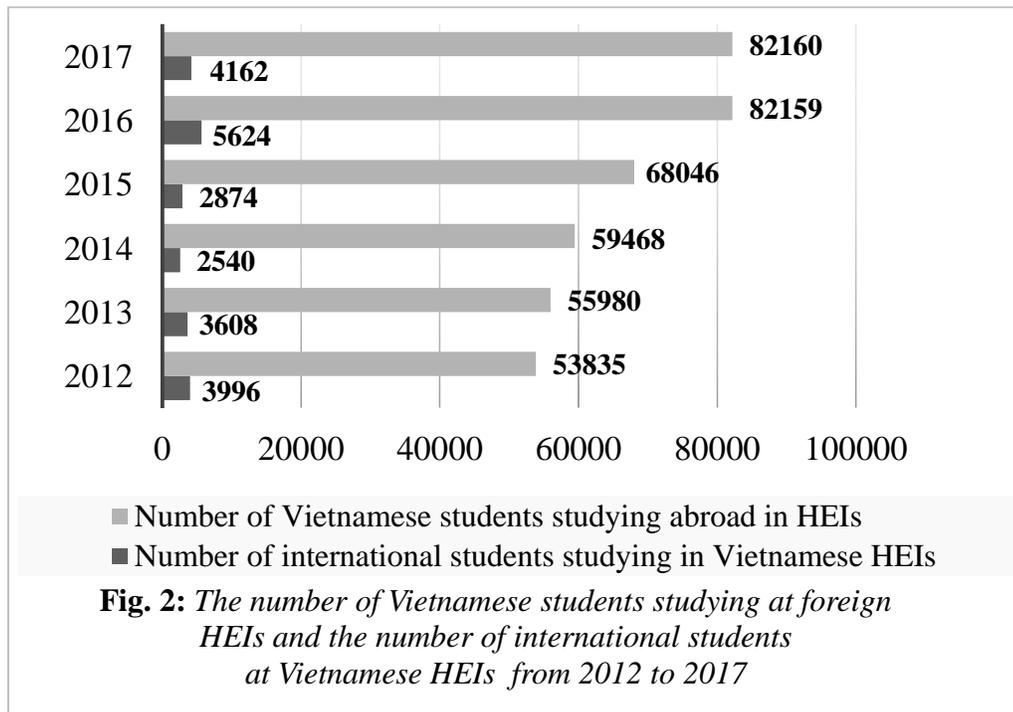
According to the statistic data of UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2018), the number of international students studying at Vietnamese HEIs in 2017 was 4,162 which decreased in comparison with the number of international students in the previous year, accounted for only 166 students more than that in 2012. The number of international students in Vietnam is the lowest compared to three other SEA countries with available statistic data (Figure 1)



Source: <http://www.uis.unesco.org>

On the contrary, the number of Vietnamese students studying abroad at HEIs sharply increased in the period between 2012 and 2017. 53,835 students in 2012 to 82,160 students in 2017 (UIS, 2018; Figure 2).

In the school year 2017/2018, Vietnam stands at the 6<sup>th</sup> position among the countries from which students go studying in the United States of America with a total number of 24,235 students, increasing in 17 successive years with the increase degree of 8.4% compared to the previous year (IIE 2018).



Source: [data.uis.unesco.org](http://data.uis.unesco.org)

With above results, it is obvious to affirm that the global competitiveness of Vietnamese HE is still weak. There are many reasons leading to this situation, but the main one is that Vietnam still lacks of a vision and a strategy in the global competitiveness of HE.

### ***3.3. Solutions to increase the competitiveness of the Vietnamese higher education system***

#### *3.3.1. Improvement of the awareness of the global competitiveness in higher education*

It is to raise the awareness of leaders and managers at all levels, especially that of the leaders and managers of national management agencies in HE as well as the awareness of management officers, staff and students at HEIs on the global competitiveness of HE. The improvement of the competitiveness of the whole system in general, that of each HEI, in particular, should be considered not only to contribute to the increase of the national competitiveness but also to the raise of the pride of each individual. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education and Training should figure out the theory and the reality of the global competitiveness of HE in the new context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution based on careful research on this field, then to strongly promote the implementation in the whole system.

Based on it, HEIs increase communication on the global competitiveness of HE through different channels, of which the channel with modern technology is focused; provide knowledge of and skill in the global competitiveness of HE through seminars, conferences, workshops and training courses; create management impacts in order to develop self-cognition about the global competitiveness of HE.

#### *3.3.2. Determination of the vision on development of the Vietnamese competitiveness driven by higher education system*

The Vietnamese Communist Party determines strategic goals in the development of the country up to the year 2030 and the vision up to the year 2045: “By 2030, Vietnam will accomplish its industrialization and modernization, basically becoming a modernity-oriented industrialized country among the top three ASEAN countries in industry, with some of its industries being globally competitive and deeply participating in the global value chain; By 2045, Vietnam will become a modern, industrialized country” (VLLF, 2018). Therefore, the Government should determine comprehensive strategic goals for the development of Vietnamese HE to 2030 and the vision to 2045. Accordingly, HE must become an essential motivation for the implementation of the national development goal and vision; Vietnam must become one of the centres for HE in the region.

#### *3.3.3. Building the strategy to increase of the competitiveness of the Vietnamese higher education system*

In order to implement the comprehensive strategic goal for the development of the Vietnamese HE to 2030 and the vision to 2045, it is necessary to build a national strategy for the improvement of the competitiveness of the Vietnamese HE system. There are two key solutions to this strategy as follows:

a) determine and invest in the development of some HEIs, especially public research universities and potential private universities to help them become the best universities in the region and the world.

b) to internationalize the Vietnamese HE system including the increase of promotion activities at the global scope in the Vietnamese HE system; the increase of the quantity of training programs and HEIs with international accreditation; the increase of the quantity of the training programs conducted in English at HEIs (including the programs associated/cooperated with the top HEIs in the region and in the world); the increase of the attractiveness to international training and research staff; the increase of international cooperation by HEIs for research and development.

The implementation roadmap of this strategy should consist of 4 phases: Phase 1 (now - 2020): building motivation and creating foundation for transformation of the HE system; Phase 2 (2021 - 2025): accelerate the HE system improvement; Phase 3 (2026 - 2030): strengthening the global competitiveness of the HE system; Phase 4 (2031 - 2045): implementing the goal of becoming one of the centres for HE in the region.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The global competition in HE is an important motivation for the development of HE system meeting the globalization in general and the globalization in HE in particular. Therefore, it is necessary to strongly improve the competitiveness of the Vietnamese HE system in order to increase its ranking position in global competitiveness. These three above solutions to increase the global competitiveness of the Vietnamese HE system need to be implemented comprehensively with high determination of the Government, the Ministry of Education and Training, and all HEIs.

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## **TÓM TẮT**

### **NÂNG CAO NĂNG LỰC CẠNH TRANH TOÀN CẦU CỦA HỆ THỐNG GIÁO DỤC ĐẠI HỌC VIỆT NAM**

Giáo dục đại học có vai trò quan trọng trong việc thúc đẩy phát triển kinh tế - xã hội, đảm bảo an ninh, quốc phòng, là một trụ cột quan trọng trong năng lực cạnh tranh toàn cầu của Việt Nam. Bài viết này phân tích, đánh giá năng lực cạnh tranh toàn cầu của hệ thống giáo dục đại học Việt Nam thông qua vị trí xếp hạng giáo dục đại học khu vực và quốc tế và khả năng thu hút sinh viên quốc tế. Trên cơ sở đó, ba giải pháp cơ bản được đề xuất nhằm nâng cao năng lực cạnh tranh toàn cầu của hệ thống giáo dục đại học Việt Nam.