E-learning and University staff development in Vietnam

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Abstract: This article focuses on e-learning and its impact on the development and quality improvement of faculty at Vietnamese universities. The article analyzes the current state of training quality and the quality of the teaching staff, on that basis, seeks to upgrade and improve this status through the application of current popular e-learning tools.

Keywords: E-learning, university lecturers, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Along with the strong development of information and communication technology (ICT), online training (E-learning) was born as a revolution in teaching and learning, becoming an inevitable trend of all times and growing rapidly in developed and developing countries. The term E-Learning has become familiar in the world in recent decades. Along with the development of ICT, educational methods are increasingly improved in quality, saving time and money for learners. Right from its inception, E-Learning has penetrated into most of the educational and training activities around the world, proven through the success of modern education systems in many countries such as USA, UK, Japan. E-Learning is a new teaching method based on ICT. With E-Learning, learning is flexible and open. Learners can learn at any time, anywhere, with anyone, learn the issues they are interested in, in accordance with their abilities and interests, in line with the job requirements, with just only a computer connected to Internet (Thuong & Tien, 2019, 2019a, 2019b). This learning method is highly interactive, supplementing traditional methods, contributing to improving teaching quality.

Currently, according to different perspectives, there are many ways of understanding E-Learning. In a broad sense, E-Learning is a term used to describe learning and training based on ICT. From a modern point of view, E-Learning is the delivery of learning content through modern electronic tools such as computers, satellite networks, Internet and intranet. Teachers and learners can communicate with each other via the network ina form of e-mail, online discussion (chat), forum, video conference (Thuong & Tien, 2019).

Improving the efficiency and quality of education is one of the decisive factors for the existence and development of a nation and each individual. E-Learning is a teaching and learning method that is very suitable in training high-quality human resources to meet social requirements. This model has created profound changes in education, in which time and space will no longer be tightly bound, learners can participate in learning without going to school. The transfer of knowledge no longer occupies the leading position of education, learners must learn to find the information they need, process information to turn them into knowledge. In the explosive era of ICT and the Internet, updating new trends conveniently and quickly helps us save time, effort, and study much more effectively than traditional methods. Tens of thousands of students who have been studying by this method are satisfied with its quality and advantages (Thuong & Tien, 2019a).

Currently, E-learning develops unevenly in different regions of the world. The strongest development in North America and Europe, while Asia and especially Southeast Asia is the region where the application of this technology is still inadequate, but the prospect is very bright. In fact, online learning is not new around the world. In Vietnam, it has only begun to develop in recent years, at the same time when broadband Internet connection has been strongly deployed to all schools. The usefulness and convenience of E-learning are clear, but to achieve success, management levels need to make reasonable decisions. Vietnam has joined the Asia E-learning Network (AEN, www.asia-elearning.net) with the participation of the Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Posts and Telecommunication. This shows that the research and application of this type of training is of great interest in Vietnam. However, compared to other countries in the world, E-learning in Vietnam is only in the early stages and there is still a lot of work to be done to catch up with other countries. The policy of the Ministry of Education and Training in the coming period is to actively implement action programs to build a learning society in which all citizens have the opportunity to study anything at any time in anywhere and lifelong learning (Duc et al, 2019; Tien, 2016, 2016a). To achieve the above goals, E-learning needs to play a key role in creating a truly virtual learning environment.

2. Current state of quality of teaching of lecturers in Vietnam

2.1. General assessment

Education and training play an important role, a key factor, and a driving force for socio-economic development. Not only in Vietnam but in most other countries around the world, governments consider education as a top national policy. So why is education and training so important to the national development strategy?

– Firstly: Education and training are prerequisites to contribute to socio-economic development.

– Second: Education and training contribute to socio-political stability.

– Third: Education and training contribute to raising the human development index.

Understanding this, Vietnam is also one of the countries that attach great importance to the development of education as it has been consolidating and building a really good quality education. Therefore, during the past years, the Party and State have always paid great attention to and focused on investing in Vietnamese education. Currently, there are about 300 higher education institutions nationwide, including national and regional universities, public, semi-public and people-founded universities and academies. The teaching staff is constantly improving in quality and size, the number of students has increased significantly (about 15 times compared to 20 years ago) and therefore the educational and development level of the people has increased markedly (Tien, 2018, 2018a, 2018b). These achievements are worthy of respect and honor.

2.2. Current status of teaching quality at universities in Vietnam:

In recent years, Vietnamese higher education has made positive changes, making an important contribution to human resource training and socio-economic development. However, with more than 200,000 people with university degrees falling into unemployment, the education sector needs effective solutions to deal with difficulties, promote development of higher education, meet social needs. Regarding the assessment method, it is not only in the form of multiple-choice tests and essays that the learners' understanding can be assessed. The lecturers also implement many other assessment methods such as: Q&A, seminars, topics, projects. Each method is effective to a certain extent and no method is the best. On the other hand, the important issue is what will happen behind the taught knowledge, where and how will that knowledge be applied. Currently, the teaching style of lecturers at universities is gradually getting better, they have made students feel like the subject they are teaching, demonstrating their creative thinking and abilities to solve problems for students to do it on their own through subject content), a combination of theory and practice (assignment of thematic implementation, field visits, data collection and processing and then reporting to the class). The most important thing is that the lecturer must always follow up and pay attention to the problems assigned to the students, help them solve the problems and familiarize with social reality of the culture of behavior, work and competition; dealing with unprecedented situations, indicating where to apply learned knowledge to solve real problems in society. These are the most eloquent examples to make students excited in learning. In order for the new teaching method to be applied, the class size must be a maximum of 50 students, ideally 30 to 35. Of course, we are facing conflicts between class size and teachers' incomes and quality of training. These problems also need to be addressed. It is necessary to award points to students at the end of the course to encourage students who are really interested, have a lot of creativity and new ideas in studying and performing assigned tasks. The students also do not necessarily have to take a final exam, it is possible for them to do a research topic and then report, perform assigned exercises and take the average of those lessons. Knowledge is mainly for solving problems, building and enhancing skills in life and profession (Thuong & Tien, 2019b).

2.3. Current status of the quality of teaching staff at universities in Vietnam:

The current quality of university lecturers is not high enough to meet the requirements of the international integration. In the past 30 years, the number of masters has increased continuously at a commensurate level, but the number of PhDs has only been gradually increased in the 2010-2015 period, the number of professors has increased insignificantly. The number of lecturers that have University and college degrees increased significantly, but in the period 2011 - 2012 there was a tendency to decrease gradually. Regarding the structure of lecturers, the number of professors in the whole country in 2015 was only 5.17%, the number of doctorates reached 12.06% (while the average number of professors in Western universities was about 70% of the teaching staff having doctoral degrees), master's degrees account for 46.41%. The data shows that the quality of university lecturers in Vietnam is still very low (12.06% have doctorates, only reaching 48.24% of the target of the Education Development

Strategy). Although the number of teachers who meet and exceed the standards of training is very high, the capacity and professional qualifications of many teachers are still limited, especially teachers working in mountainous areas, with little conditions to improve and update knowledge. Most of the teachers have been trained in pedagogical issues. The computer and foreign language skills of the teaching staff have been improved. However, there is still a large part that has not met the requirements in terms of pedagogical capacity, computer literacy and foreign languages. This is the reason why teachers have difficulty in accessing advanced teaching methods, limiting their ability in scientific research and international cooperation. The teaching staff using English as a language of instruction are only concentrated in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. In addition, a part of the teaching staff showed signs of irresponsibility, lack of enthusiasm for the profession, violation of code of ethics, adversely affecting the reputation of teachers in society. The teaching and scientific research capacity of the teaching staff is still low. Teaching methods, examination, testing and evaluation of lecturers have been slowly innovated. The teaching content is still heavily reliant on theory and books, not suitable for characteristics of different types of educational institutions, regions and learners. Training is not really tied to applying knowledge to socio-economic life; also there have not been strong changes according to social needs without paying attention to life skills education, soft skills training, promoting students' creativity and professional capacity (Yen et al, 2019).

3. The role of e-learning in enhancing teaching quality in Vietnam

3.1. Overview of E-learning

Vietnam has joined the Asian E-Learning network with the participation of the Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Ministry of Information and Communication. The policy of the Ministry of Education and Training in the coming period is to actively implement action programs to build a learning society in which all citizens have the opportunity to study, towards learning anything, anytime, anywhere and lifelong learning. To achieve the above objectives, E-Learning has a key role in creating a virtual learning environment. In e-learning as well as in traditional teaching, the role of the teacher is essential in implementing the learning process and content. The teacher can appear in virtual or real form depending on the content to be taught; organize seminars, discussions online or in person in class; create an online space for all students to interact directly (chat, voice chat). In traditional classroom teaching, it is recommended to combine the presentation of videos related to the lesson for students to gradually familiarize themselves with modern technology, make specific study plans and assign tasks to students so that they can meet and exchange directly or through learning forums. Testing and evaluating students can be in the form of multiple choice tests in class on paper or right on the computer, discussing and working to implement group projects. Teachers not only need to grasp new learning methods but also have to be active participants in composing electronic lectures, case studies, and exercises for teaching and for learners' self-study. Therefore, there must be a significant investment in equipment, financial support, training and experience exchange in using new technology for the teaching staff to meet the most modern teaching requirements such as skills, the ability to apply ICT in teaching, design good quality electronic lectures, use modern teaching means and most importantly, have the ability to do research and self-study. It is necessary to strengthen the E-learning management team in terms of quantity and quality, to improve their qualifications so that they can not only operate well and promptly handle incidents when problems occur, but also have long-term development strategies, expand the scale and scope of E-learning application in teaching, learning and educational management (Tien, 2018, 2019).

3.2. The role of E-learning in improving the quality of teaching in Vietnam:

In the environment of Industrial Revolution 4.0, training methods need to change fundamentally on the basis of taking learners to the center, maximum application of ICT in the design and delivery of lectures. Along with that, there is a fundamental innovation in the form and method of examination towards meeting the working capacity and creativity of learners. E-learning is an effective and modern form of teaching that improves the quality of teaching. To use E-learning in improving teaching quality in Vietnam (Yen et al, 2019; Duc et al, 2019):

- The Ministry of Education and Training, universities and colleges, and educational institutions need to define E-Learning as a new education strategy towards a learning society. It is necessary to deploy, propagate and replicate the E-Learning model not only in the education sector but also in the whole society.

- Strengthen training on methods and skills, using a combination of many components to create E-Learning lessons.

- Invest in technical equipment and provide financial support for lecturers in creating E-Learning lessons.

- Towards the onlineization of schools, including the onlineization of management, operations and teaching. The school website must become a friendly address for officials, lecturers and students. Self-study and online exchange are necessary skills for learners to study in universities and vocational education institutions.

The e-learning training method allows students to fully master their own learning process, from viewpoint of time, amount of knowledge as well as the sequence of lessons, especially online looking up related knowledge. Access to lessons instantly, review lessons learned quickly, freely communicate with each other and with teachers during the learning process are things that are not possible in traditional learning. The results achieved from E-Learning are higher than that of traditional learning methods because E-Learning has interactive multimedia, enabling learners to exchange information more easily, as well as provide adequate learning content. Training is tailored to each individual's abilities and interests. According to experts, E-Learning transforms the way of learning as well as the role of learners. Learners play a central and active role in the training process, and can learn anytime, anywhere thanks to learning tools. Learners can study according to their personal schedule, at a pace depending on their

ability and can choose the learning content according to their interests. E-Learning also attracts a lot of learners, especially suitable for the situation of working people. Distance learning programs in the world today have reached a rich level of interface, with multimedia effects such as sound, images, three-dimensional animations, with a high degree of similarity of the real world in terms of high interaction between users and program, direct conversation over the network. This makes students interested and passionate in the process of acquiring knowledge as well as effective in learning.

With the application of E-Learning, lecturers can spend more time for students to self-study and read the materials provided, but still ensure a close relationship between lecturers and students during non-classroom time. Therefore, in order for the E-Learning application model to support teaching and learning more effectively, contributing to improving the quality of training under the credit system, the school needs to have specific policies on the application of E-Learning for teachers and students in daily teaching and learning (Tien, 2004, 2008).

4. The role of e-learning in university staff development in Vietnam

The role of E-Learning in developing teaching staff is also extremely important. With professional characteristics, self-improvement and training are very important. Therefore, in the world as well as in Vietnam, the regular training and professional development of lecturers is always interested and implemented in a variety of ways. Therefore, the lecturer not only grasps the learning method but also creates the lesson for teaching and for learners' self-study. There must be a form of training for teaching staff that meets the most modern teaching requirements: such as being able to apply IT in teaching, being able to use modern teaching facilities, and most importantly, capacity for self-study and scientific research. It is an important foundation so that the lecturer does not lag behind the times. Faced with this fact, self-improvement and regular training for teachers are essential to meet the rapid changes in technology in the digital era as well as the current educational innovation goals. One of the advantages of university lecturers is regular training in the form of E-Learning which promises many advantages and good effects. Storing behavior or results of regular learning activities of learners combined with the process of analyzing data and standards of university lecturers will help suggest the selection of suitable content for students. The process of fostering through E-learning requires teachers to change themselves to improve quality. In various forms, the school encourages and creates favorable conditions for teachers in the faculties to be proactive and to best complete electronic lectures. Teaching units need to focus on spending a lot of time and enthusiasm on building a good quality electronic lecture system by doing specific things such as: creating optimal conditions for the teaching staff to compile learning materials, provide high-quality sample lectures, and practical reports from leading experts in the field; organizing contests to design electronic lectures, exchanging experiences on using E-learning at reputable training institutions at home and abroad, listen to learners' feedback and promptly complete the lesson (Tien, 2019; Thuong & Tien, 2019).

4.1. E-Learning helps reduce boredom

The best instructors get bored teaching the same way over and over again. They expect students to ask more questions. E-Learning helps teachers get rid of this boredom. Instructors will have time to focus on helping to exchange information with students, improve the quality of teaching content, and other activities that require real experience, skills, and qualifications. E-Learning is a method of interaction between teachers and students.

4.2. E-Learning helps reduce travel time

Many lecturers believe that having to travel far to teach, not being close to home is one of the biggest obstacles. E-Learning can limit the distance of lecturers to training facilities. E-learning helps teachers save commuting time to focus on lectures. This way, teachers can spend more time with their families and themselves.

4.3. Teachers with new careers

Many faculty members are looking for new careers. They enjoy teaching profession and do not want to switch to teaching management. E-Learning creates new careers where teachers can apply both their knowledge of instructional design and communication skills.

4.4. Reduce training costs

E-Learning reduces training costs by 50% to 90%, especially when training for a large number of people that take a long time to get to the training site. E-Learning eliminates travel and other extra costs. With the development of the Internet, almost every business sector benefits in formulating pricing policies for their customers, and e-learning services are of no exception. According to Elliott Masie, a well-known expert on e-learning, the application of technology is to create, provide, support and extend the traditional way of learning. The development of Internet, with the ability to help students access training courses continuously in an effective and economical way, has created a new stage for learning and teaching to reach new heights.

4.5. Help train special students

Not everyone gets to go to class. Not everyone learns effectively in the classroom. E-Learning can be considered as an alternative solution for the following reasons:

• Trainees living far away do not have enough time and funds to attend traditional training courses.

• Busy students cannot attend traditional classes on schedule.

• The trainees were on their way to the training site but did not arrive on time.

• Practitioners are afraid to appear in public.

• Foreign students with language difficulties do not understand the teacher speaking too fast.

4.6. Make classroom training more exciting

E-Learning complements, enhances, but does not replace traditional learning methods. If additional means to access the web are provided in the classroom, the online resources, the interoperability of the examples, and the updated information will make the classroom radically changed in terms of the learning style. Other means of communication such as email, chat, and online discussion will help students and lecturers get closer to each other.

5. Conclusions

In modern society and in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0, people need to study continuously, learn for life to equip themselves with constantly changing knowledge in many fields. Online learning (E-Learning) was chosen as an optimal method, providing students with an active, positive learning environment and being able to study anytime, anywhere. However, this learning environment has the limitation that it requires a high degree of initiative and positivity from learners and it is difficult to monitor, manage and recognize the progress of students in the learning process.

E-Learning is a general trend of world education. The implementation of E-Learning in education and training is an inevitable trend to bring Vietnamese education to the world. It can be said that the implementation of E-Learning applications in institutes and schools in recent years shows that this is an inevitable trend of all times. The results of the application of E-Learning make an important contribution to innovate teaching methods and improve the quality of training. However, in order for E-Learning to be widely applied and bring high efficiency in teaching and learning, it is necessary to have synchronous and long-term policies for this project. Therefore, a combined solution is to use E-Learning and traditional teaching methods in parallel. Learners can perform all learning activities on E-Learning as if they were studying a real course. It is necessary to organize regular training courses for teachers to apply e-learning to teach the subject they are in charge of. To do this well, the school needs to spend a part of the annual budget for e-learning training in particular and software to support lesson development in general. Thus, the innovation of teaching methods will be promoted more effectively and gradually create a movement of e-learning application spreading throughout the school.

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