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## Vietnam's higher education sector has a long way to go



**Despite billions of dong being poured into higher education, Vietnam is sliding down international education rankings lists.**

Two students in a practice period at Ho Chi Minh City's University of Science. Two of the failings in Vietnam's higher education are the outdated curricula and too little practical experience.

According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, from 2000 to 2006 the state budget for education increased from VND12.6 trillion (US\$762 million) a year to VND37.3 trillion (\$2.2 billion) a year. The figures do not include the contributions of parents.

This year the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) planned to spend VND76.2 trillion (\$4.6 billion), double the allocation of 2006. The ministry is yet to report its actual expenditure.

It is estimated the budget for higher education accounts for 9 percent of total government spending.

However, while investment into education keeps increasing, the country's position keeps falling in international education rankings and reports.

In October, the World Economic Forum (WEF) released its Global Competitiveness Report 2008-2009, which positioned Vietnam 98th out of 134 surveyed countries in terms of higher education and training.

Last year, the report ranked Vietnam 79th out of 129 countries.

The rankings are calculated from both publicly available data and a WEF survey conducted by WEF and leading research institutes and business organizations.

MoET's report on educational quality in 2008 said in international university rankings conducted by scientific journals and organizations, such as the Times Higher Education Supplement and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Vietnam was yet to be listed.

### Several key failings

By this August, 369 universities and colleges were operating nationwide with more than 1.6 million students enrolled, according to the Higher Education Department under MoET.

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Within six years from 1998 to 2004, 31 universities and 15 colleges were established.

From 2005 to 2007, however, it is estimated 69 universities and 28 colleges were established. This means every week one university and one college were set up.

Despite the increasing number of schools, educators keep complaining about the quality of education in Vietnam.

The first failing in most of the schools is the quantity and quality of teachers, they said.

With some 52,000 teachers and 1.6 million students, the ratio of teachers to students is 1:28, MoET reported in August. The ratio is as high as 1:30 for private schools.

Compared to other countries, where ratios are between 1:15 and 1:20, Vietnam now has a shortage of 30,000 to 50,000 teachers in the higher education sector, newswire VietnamNet recently reported.

In other words, "the number of teachers for our higher education only satisfied 60 percent of demand," the paper quoted a MoET official as saying.

MoET also reported some 10 percent of the teachers hold doctorate degrees, while in other countries the proportion is between 60 percent and 75 percent.

Many private schools have recently been exposed falsifying the number of doctorate and master's degree holders they employ.

Ho Chi Minh City's Van Xuan College of Technology reported it had 20 doctorate holders and 105 master's degree holders, but inspectors found out it had only one doctorate holder and six master's holders.

At other countries' universities, most of teachers have research and articles published in international scientific journals. In Vietnam very few teachers have been published.

According to the World Bank's World Development Report 2006, Vietnam's two major scientific centers – the National University in Hanoi and Hanoi University of Technology – had 34 scientific works listed by the Institute for Scientific Information in the US.

However, the Republic of Korea's Seoul National University had 4,556 works listed and China's Peking University had nearly 3,000.

The second shortcoming, experts said, is the theory-centered curriculum.

"In Vietnam, students spend too much time taking theoretical courses," Doctor Peter Gray from the US Navy Academy told an educational conference held last year. "So they don't have enough time to think about what they have learned, research and practice outside class."

Moreover, the curricula of many subjects are out-dated, while students do not often join discussions with teachers, but only write down what they are told.

At a national conference on the quality of higher education earlier this year, MoET reported more than 50 percent of university graduates needed re-training before starting their jobs.

*Reported by Lan Tuong\**

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