

Quality Assurance in Educational Management Programs in Vietnam: Policy Foundations, Implementation Challenges, and a Framework for Continuous Improvement

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Quality assurance has become a central component of higher education governance in Vietnam as universities have been granted greater autonomy while being required to demonstrate accountability, transparency, and educational effectiveness. Educational Management programs have a particularly important role in this context because they prepare administrators, education officers, institutional leaders, quality assurance specialists, policy analysts, and other professionals whose decisions may influence the performance of schools, universities, and education authorities. This article analyses the policy foundations, operational dimensions, major implementation challenges, and development priorities of quality assurance in Educational Management programs in Vietnam. The study employed a narrative literature review combined with qualitative policy analysis. The documentary corpus included Vietnamese legislation and ministerial regulations, official quality assurance documents, international quality assurance frameworks, and academic studies concerning higher education governance, accreditation, internal quality assurance, quality culture, academic staff, and program improvement in Vietnam. The analysis indicates that Vietnam has established a progressively structured regulatory framework linking institutional autonomy with accountability, internal quality assurance, external accreditation, program standards, learning outcomes, stakeholder participation, and public disclosure. However, substantial implementation challenges remain. These include ambiguous learning outcomes, insufficient alignment among program objectives, curricula, teaching methods, and assessment, limited use of authentic assessment, fragmented quality data, uneven stakeholder participation, inadequate assessment literacy, and the tendency to treat accreditation as a temporary documentation exercise. In response, the article proposes an integrated framework comprising seven dimensions: quality governance and culture, stakeholder-responsive program objectives, outcome-based curriculum design, learner-centred teaching and authentic assessment, academic staff and learning resources, evidence-based monitoring, and continuous improvement with public accountability. The article argues that quality assurance in Educational Management programs should move beyond formal compliance and accreditation status toward a continuous system in which valid evidence of student learning and professional capability informs academic and managerial decisions. The credibility of quality assurance should ultimately be judged by its contribution to graduate competence, program relevance, institutional learning, and educational improvement.</i> Keywords: quality assurance; Educational Management; higher education; program accreditation; learning outcomes; quality culture; continuous improvement; Vietnam.
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Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Tran, H.-N. (2026). Quality assurance in educational management programs in Vietnam: Policy foundations, implementation challenges, and a framework for continuous improvement. UKR Journal of Education and Literature, 2(4), 169-181.	

1. Introduction

Quality assurance has become an indispensable element of contemporary higher education governance. The rapid expansion of higher education, increasing diversity of educational providers, greater mobility of students and academic staff, technological transformation, and intensified public expectations have created strong pressure on universities to demonstrate the relevance and effectiveness of their academic programs. Educational quality can no longer be inferred only from institutional reputation, admission selectivity, lecturer qualifications, curriculum content, or the number of graduates. Higher education institutions are increasingly required to provide credible evidence that their programs have appropriate objectives, that students achieve clearly defined learning outcomes, and that academic and managerial decisions are informed by systematic evaluation.

The concept of quality in higher education is inherently multidimensional. Harvey and Green identified several influential ways of understanding quality, including quality as exceptional performance, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation [1]. These interpretations remain relevant because different stakeholders may understand educational quality in different ways. Government authorities may emphasize compliance and accountability, employers may prioritize professional competence, students may focus on learning experience and employability, and universities may attach importance to academic standards, institutional mission, and continuous development. A credible quality assurance system must acknowledge these perspectives while avoiding the assumption that any single indicator can fully represent educational quality.

In Vietnam, quality assurance has developed alongside major reforms in higher education governance. Law No. 34/2018/QH14, which amended and supplemented several articles of the Law on Higher Education, strengthened institutional autonomy while reinforcing obligations concerning accountability, quality assurance, accreditation, and public disclosure [2]. The law took effect on July 1, 2019, and provided a revised legal foundation for the relationship between state management and institutional self-governance. ([Văn Bản Chính Phủ](#)) Decree No. 99/2019/ND-CP subsequently detailed the implementation of several provisions of the amended legislation and further clarified the responsibilities of autonomous higher education institutions [3]. The policy direction indicates that autonomy should not be interpreted as freedom from evaluation. Instead, greater institutional authority must be accompanied by stronger internal governance, transparent decision-making, reliable evidence, and responsibility for educational outcomes.

The Ministry of Education and Training has also issued regulations addressing the design, implementation, and evaluation of higher education programs. Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDĐT regulates standards for higher education programs and the processes for developing, evaluating, and promulgating such programs [4]. Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDĐT provides regulations on undergraduate education and establishes requirements concerning program implementation, learner progression, assessment, and graduation [5]. These regulations reinforce an outcome-oriented approach in which program structures, course delivery, assessment, and graduation requirements should be connected to intended learning outcomes.

A further regulatory development occurred on February 17, 2025, when the Ministry of Education and Training issued Circular No. 04/2025/TT-BGDĐT on the accreditation of higher education programs [6]. The new regulation was developed with reference to the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance framework at program level and adjusted to the conditions of Vietnamese higher education. Official information from the Vietnam Education Quality Management Agency states that the Circular contains five chapters and forty-six articles and reflects an effort to strengthen substantive, outcome-oriented program evaluation. The development of this framework demonstrates Vietnam's continuing movement toward greater compatibility with regional quality assurance practices.

Educational Management programs occupy a distinctive position within this policy environment. They prepare graduates for roles involving educational leadership, institutional administration, quality assurance, policy implementation, personnel management, planning, evaluation, student services, and organizational development. Graduates may work in schools, universities, government agencies, education departments, research institutes, accreditation and quality assurance units, training organizations, and education-related enterprises. Their professional decisions can influence the allocation of resources, implementation of curricula, management of staff, assessment of institutional performance, and protection of learner interests.

The quality of an Educational Management program therefore has consequences beyond the employment outcomes of its graduates. When educational managers lack analytical competence, ethical judgement, assessment literacy, or the ability to use evidence, institutional decisions may become procedural, fragmented, or politically driven. Accreditation may be reduced to documentation, performance indicators may be used without adequate interpretation, and organizational problems may be addressed through short-term

administrative measures rather than systematic analysis. Conversely, graduates who can combine educational knowledge, management competence, ethical responsibility, and evidence-based decision-making may contribute to more effective and accountable institutions.

Despite this strategic importance, the quality assurance of Educational Management programs has received limited focused attention in comparison with institutional accreditation or quality assurance in highly regulated professional disciplines. Much of the existing literature examines the development of Vietnam's national accreditation system, internal quality assurance, university autonomy, quality culture, or quality assurance personnel at a general level. These studies are highly relevant, but their findings require interpretation in relation to the characteristics of Educational Management as an interdisciplinary and practice-oriented field.

This article therefore investigates the policy foundations and implementation requirements of quality assurance in Educational Management programs in Vietnam. It addresses three research questions. First, what conceptual and regulatory foundations shape quality assurance in Educational Management programs? Second, what major weaknesses may prevent current quality assurance practices from producing substantive educational improvement? Third, what integrated framework can support the transition from accreditation-oriented compliance to continuous program improvement?

The article does not present a nationwide survey and does not claim that every identified weakness occurs in every institution. Such a claim would be methodologically unjustified. Instead, the study develops a policy-grounded and evidence-informed analysis based on legal documents, official quality assurance frameworks, and relevant academic research. Its intended contribution is to provide a coherent framework that universities may adapt, test, and refine through future empirical research.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research design

The study employed a narrative literature review combined with qualitative policy analysis. This approach was selected because the objective was to integrate conceptual, legal, and empirical evidence concerning quality assurance rather than calculate a pooled effect or estimate the national prevalence of particular practices. The documentary nature of the research also made it possible to examine relationships among legislation, accreditation requirements, internal quality assurance, curriculum development, student assessment, and program improvement.

A narrative review was considered appropriate because the source material was heterogeneous. It included legal documents, ministerial regulations, international guidelines, official reports, conceptual studies, qualitative investigations, case studies, and program-level quality assurance research. These materials differ in objectives, methods, units of analysis, and evidentiary status. A statistical synthesis would therefore have been inappropriate.

2.2. Source identification and selection

The documentary corpus consisted of four main categories. The first category included Vietnamese laws, decrees, and ministerial circulars governing higher education, program development, undergraduate education, institutional autonomy, accreditation, and the evaluation of accreditation organizations. The second category included official guidance from Vietnamese and regional quality assurance bodies. The third category comprised peer-reviewed academic studies on higher education governance and quality assurance in Vietnam. The fourth category included conceptual literature addressing definitions of quality, quality culture, internal quality assurance, and continuous improvement.

Sources were selected according to relevance, authority, methodological clarity, and direct applicability to the study questions. Official legal databases and publications of the Ministry of Education and Training were prioritized when determining the content and effective dates of regulations. Peer-reviewed research was prioritized when analysing implementation experiences and challenges. International frameworks were included when they had influenced or provided a useful reference for program-level quality assurance in Vietnam.

The literature selection was purposive rather than exhaustive. The objective was not to identify every publication concerning Vietnamese higher education but to assemble a reliable body of documents capable of supporting the analytical framework. The final reference set included 18 sources comprising Vietnamese legal documents, regional and international quality assurance frameworks, and peer-reviewed studies.

2.3. Analytical procedure

The selected documents were read and coded according to themes derived from program-level quality assurance. The initial categories included institutional governance, quality culture, program objectives, expected learning outcomes, curriculum design, teaching and learning, assessment, academic staff, learner support, physical and digital resources, stakeholder participation, data management, external accreditation, and continuous improvement.

A second stage of analysis examined the relationships among these categories. Particular attention was given to the chain connecting stakeholder needs, program objectives, expected learning outcomes, curriculum content, learning activities, assessment evidence, graduate performance, and improvement decisions. Weaknesses were identified where the literature indicated a disconnection between formal quality assurance processes and educational outcomes.

The final analytical stage involved constructing an integrated framework tailored to Educational Management programs. The proposed framework does not replace national accreditation standards. It translates major quality principles into a program management model that institutions may apply between accreditation cycles.

2.4. Scope and limitations

For the purposes of this study, Educational Management programs refer to undergraduate and postgraduate programs that prepare learners for administrative, managerial, leadership, planning, quality assurance, evaluation, policy, and organizational development roles in education. The study primarily addresses programs implemented by Vietnamese higher education institutions.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study is documentary and does not include primary data from students, lecturers, employers, alumni, or university managers. Second, it does not compare individual universities or rank programs. Third, the availability and completeness of public information vary among institutions. Fourth, accreditation status is not equivalent to a comprehensive measure of graduate competence or long-term program effectiveness. The conclusions should therefore be interpreted as an analytical synthesis rather than a statistical representation of all Educational Management programs in Vietnam.

3. Conceptual Foundations of Quality Assurance

3.1. Educational quality as a multidimensional construct

Educational quality is not a fixed or universally agreed concept. Harvey and Green's conceptualization demonstrates that quality may refer to excellence, consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money, or transformation [1]. Each interpretation captures an important dimension but becomes inadequate when applied in isolation. Excellence may privilege already advantaged institutions. Consistency may reward standardized procedures without evaluating whether their objectives are worthwhile. Fitness for purpose may accept weak objectives if a program achieves them efficiently. Value for money may reduce education to measurable economic

returns. Transformation emphasizes student development but may be difficult to assess consistently.

For Educational Management programs, the most appropriate interpretation combines fitness for purpose, fitness of purpose, and transformation. Fitness for purpose concerns whether a program achieves its stated objectives. Fitness of purpose asks whether those objectives remain relevant to changes in educational governance, technology, policy, and professional practice. Transformation concerns whether students develop the knowledge, competence, judgement, and professional identity expected of educational managers.

A program may be internally consistent but still have limited quality if its objectives are outdated. For example, a curriculum may teach traditional administrative procedures effectively while providing insufficient preparation in digital governance, data protection, learning analytics, institutional risk, inclusive education, or quality improvement. Quality assurance must therefore evaluate both the effectiveness and continuing relevance of the program.

3.2. Quality control, quality assurance, and quality enhancement

Quality control, quality assurance, and quality enhancement are related but distinct functions. Quality control detects errors, deviations, or non-compliance. It may involve checking examination papers, reviewing grade calculations, verifying course files, or confirming that teaching schedules have been completed. These activities are necessary but primarily corrective.

Quality assurance establishes processes intended to provide confidence that academic standards and educational objectives will be achieved. It includes curriculum approval, staff qualification requirements, assessment moderation, course monitoring, program review, student feedback, and external evaluation. Quality assurance is therefore preventive and systemic rather than merely corrective.

Quality enhancement extends beyond compliance by pursuing systematic improvement in learning, teaching, professional relevance, and student experience. Enhancement requires institutions to identify opportunities for development even when minimum requirements have been satisfied. A program may meet accreditation standards and still require substantial improvement in authentic assessment, employer engagement, digital learning, or graduate tracking.

The distinction is important because institutions may mistakenly describe all administrative checks as quality assurance. A program that verifies the presence of course

outlines and examination papers may exercise quality control without demonstrating that students attain the expected learning outcomes. Similarly, a program that receives accreditation may have satisfied external requirements without establishing a strong culture of continuous enhancement.

3.3. Internal and external quality assurance

Internal quality assurance refers to the structures, policies, responsibilities, processes, and information systems through which an institution monitors and improves its academic activities. It includes program development, course evaluation, student assessment, staff development, data analysis, stakeholder feedback, internal review, and improvement planning. Effective internal quality assurance operates continuously and is integrated into routine academic management.

External quality assurance involves evaluation by an authorized or recognized external organization. It provides independent review against established standards and may result in accreditation or formal recognition. External review can strengthen public confidence, facilitate comparability, and expose institutional practices to wider professional judgement.

Nguyen, Evers, and Marshall's analysis of Vietnam's accreditation system identified both achievements and continuing challenges after more than a decade of development [7]. Their study emphasized that the establishment of a national quality assurance system represented significant progress but that implementation capacity, professional expertise, and the relationship between accreditation and actual improvement remained important concerns. (doi.org)

Internal and external quality assurance should be mutually reinforcing. Internal systems provide continuous evidence and support improvement before and after accreditation. External review tests institutional claims, examines the adequacy of evidence, and provides independent recommendations. Problems arise when internal quality assurance becomes active only shortly before an accreditation visit. Under such conditions, evidence is often collected retrospectively, quality assurance workloads increase sharply, and improvement may not be sustained after recognition.

3.4. Quality culture

Quality culture refers to the shared values, expectations, responsibilities, and practices through which members of an institution contribute to educational quality. It combines cultural elements, such as trust, commitment, openness, and shared responsibility, with structural elements, such as policies, procedures, indicators, and accountability.

Research conducted in higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh City found a relationship between internal quality assurance and the development of quality culture [8]. The study suggests that quality assurance mechanisms may contribute to shared quality values when they are embedded in institutional practice rather than imposed as isolated administrative requirements.

Quality culture should not be romanticized. Shared commitment alone is insufficient if responsibilities, data definitions, authority, and follow-up mechanisms are unclear. Conversely, detailed procedures cannot compensate for a culture in which staff hide weaknesses, provide favourable but inaccurate reports, or view quality assurance as the exclusive responsibility of a specialized office. Effective quality culture requires both commitment and discipline.

Within an Educational Management program, quality culture has an additional pedagogical function. Students learn not only from the formal curriculum but also from institutional practices. A program that teaches evidence-based management but makes opaque decisions sends a contradictory message. A program that teaches continuous improvement but mobilizes quality assurance only before accreditation undermines its own professional credibility.

4. The Policy and Regulatory Context in Vietnam

4.1. Higher education autonomy and accountability

Vietnam's higher education reforms have progressively expanded the authority of institutions over academic, organizational, personnel, and financial matters. Law No. 34/2018/QH14 links this autonomy with accountability, quality assurance, and transparency [2]. Decree No. 99/2019/ND-CP provides more detailed implementation provisions [3].

Autonomy creates opportunities for Educational Management programs to define distinctive orientations, update curricula, establish partnerships, develop flexible teaching approaches, and respond to local or sectoral needs. However, autonomy also transfers greater responsibility to institutions. Decisions concerning program objectives, curriculum content, staff allocation, learning resources, admission, assessment, and graduation must be academically defensible and supported by evidence.

Dao's study of governance, quality assurance, and finance in Vietnamese higher education identified major challenges associated with the reform process, including institutional capacity and the effective implementation of governance changes [9]. The article shows that reform cannot be achieved through formal decentralization alone. Institutions require the competence, systems, resources, and

accountability mechanisms necessary to use autonomy effectively.

This insight is directly relevant to program-level quality assurance. A university may formally authorize a faculty to design its own curriculum, but meaningful autonomy depends on whether program leaders can analyse stakeholder needs, formulate measurable outcomes, design valid assessment, manage data, and evaluate improvement. Without these capabilities, decentralization may simply transfer weak practices from the central administration to academic units.

4.2. Standards for program development

Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDDT establishes standards and procedures for developing, evaluating, and promulgating higher education programs [4]. Its significance lies in the requirement that programs should be designed systematically rather than assembled as collections of courses. Program objectives, learning outcomes, curriculum structure, teaching activities, and assessment should form a coherent educational design.

For Educational Management programs, coherence is difficult because the field draws on multiple disciplines. Courses may cover educational foundations, organizational theory, leadership, public administration, educational law, human-resource management, finance, planning, quality assurance, research methods, statistics, information technology, communication, and policy. Without a clear graduate profile, the curriculum may become broad but fragmented.

A defensible curriculum should explain why each component is included, which learning outcomes it supports, and how students progress from introductory knowledge to integrated professional performance. Course inclusion cannot be justified solely by tradition, lecturer availability, or comparison with older programs. The curriculum should reflect the current and anticipated work of educational managers.

4.3. Program implementation and student assessment

Circular No. 08/2021/TT-BGDDT provides the regulatory framework for undergraduate education, including program organization, student learning, assessment, progression, and graduation [5]. These areas are essential to quality assurance because a well-designed curriculum can fail when implementation is inconsistent.

Program quality depends on whether planned learning activities occur as intended, whether academic workloads are realistic, whether students receive appropriate support, and whether assessment results provide valid evidence. Graduation confirms more than the accumulation of credits.

It should indicate that students have achieved the outcomes required by the program.

This requirement creates a significant challenge. Course completion does not automatically demonstrate program-level competence. Students may pass individual courses while still being unable to integrate knowledge across fields or apply it to complex educational problems. Programs therefore need direct and indirect methods for evaluating graduate outcomes. Capstone projects, internships, professional portfolios, simulations, and integrated case analyses can provide stronger evidence than course grades alone.

4.4. Program accreditation under Circular No. 04/2025/TT-BGDDT

Circular No. 04/2025/TT-BGDDT represents an important development in program accreditation [6]. The framework reflects the influence of the AUN-QA model, which emphasizes expected learning outcomes, program structure and content, teaching and learning, student assessment, academic staff, student support, facilities, outputs, and continuous improvement [10]. Version 4.0 of the AUN-QA guide contains eight criteria and fifty-three requirements, with increased emphasis on program outcomes and improvement.

The central value of program accreditation lies in examining the coherence of the whole educational system. A program should be able to demonstrate the chain connecting stakeholder needs, program objectives, learning outcomes, curriculum, teaching, assessment, student achievement, graduate performance, and improvement. Evidence should show not only that each component exists but also that the components function together.

Accreditation can create strong incentives for institutions to formalize procedures, improve documentation, clarify responsibilities, and analyse program performance. However, it can also create undesirable behaviour when recognition becomes the primary goal. Institutions may concentrate on producing evidence that satisfies evaluators rather than examining whether the evidence reveals meaningful educational problems.

4.5. Oversight of accreditation organizations

The credibility of external quality assurance depends on the quality of accreditation organizations. Circular No. 13/2023/TT-BGDDT regulates the supervision and evaluation of higher education and pedagogical college accreditation organizations [11]. The regulation recognizes that accreditation bodies must themselves be subject to quality requirements. The Vietnam Education Quality Management Agency announced evaluation results for domestic accreditation centres in January 2026,

demonstrating the implementation of this oversight mechanism.

This is important because inconsistency among external evaluators can undermine confidence in accreditation. Accreditation organizations require competent assessors, transparent procedures, appropriate conflict-of-interest controls, reliable decision-making, and mechanisms for reviewing their own performance. Program quality cannot be credibly evaluated through a system whose own quality is uncertain.

4.6. Expansion of accreditation

Vietnam has continued to expand institutional and program accreditation. The Vietnam Education Quality Management Agency periodically publishes lists of institutions and programs that have completed self-assessment, external assessment, or formal quality recognition. An official list updated to June 30, 2026, confirms the continuing national implementation of these activities.

The expansion of accreditation represents institutional and regulatory progress. Nevertheless, the number of accredited programs should not be treated as a sufficient measure of national educational quality. Accreditation establishes that a program has been evaluated against a framework at a particular time. It does not guarantee that all graduates attain equivalent competence, that program objectives remain relevant throughout the accreditation period, or that improvement continues after recognition.

5. Characteristics of Educational Management Programs

Educational Management is interdisciplinary by nature. It draws on educational theory, management, public administration, organizational behaviour, sociology, psychology, economics, law, policy studies, research methodology, statistics, and information technology. This breadth is necessary because educational organizations are complex social institutions rather than purely technical systems.

Interdisciplinarity creates a risk of curricular fragmentation. A program may include courses from several fields without providing a coherent intellectual and professional progression. Students may learn concepts separately but lack opportunities to integrate them when analysing actual management problems. Quality assurance must therefore evaluate not only the presence of relevant courses but also the relationships among them.

Educational Management is also practice-oriented. Graduates may be expected to prepare plans, interpret regulations, analyse institutional data, manage personnel, coordinate stakeholders, evaluate programs, allocate resources, communicate decisions, and resolve

organizational problems. These capabilities require the application of knowledge under conditions of uncertainty and competing interests.

Traditional written examinations are insufficient to evaluate such competence. Students may reproduce definitions of leadership or planning without being able to lead a meeting, diagnose a management problem, or develop a feasible improvement plan. Assessment should therefore include authentic tasks approximating professional practice.

The field is highly sensitive to changes in policy and technology. Regulations governing educational institutions, quality assurance, finance, data, qualifications, student services, and personnel may change rapidly. Digital platforms, learning analytics, artificial intelligence, and online education also affect educational management. Programs require mechanisms for timely curriculum updating rather than relying only on major reviews conducted at long intervals.

Ethical responsibility is another defining feature. Educational managers exercise authority over students, staff, information, finances, and institutional opportunities. Their decisions may affect fairness, inclusion, privacy, academic integrity, and access to education. Graduate outcomes must therefore include ethical judgement, not only technical management competence.

6. Major Implementation Challenges

6.1. Ambiguous expected learning outcomes

Expected learning outcomes provide the foundation for curriculum design, teaching, assessment, and program evaluation. However, outcomes are sometimes formulated through broad expressions such as “understand educational management,” “possess leadership competence,” or “demonstrate professional responsibility.” These statements express desirable intentions but are difficult to assess reliably.

An assessable outcome should describe observable performance and indicate the expected level of complexity. Instead of stating that graduates understand educational planning, a stronger outcome would require them to analyse institutional evidence, identify a planning problem, formulate objectives, determine indicators, estimate resources, assess risks, and justify an implementation plan.

Ambiguous outcomes create several problems. Lecturers may interpret them differently, curriculum mapping becomes superficial, assessment tasks fail to measure the intended competence, and program leaders cannot determine whether graduates have achieved the required standard. The result is a quality assurance system rich in statements but weak in evidence.

6.2. Superficial curriculum mapping

Curriculum mapping is often used to show relationships between courses and program learning outcomes. However, a table containing marks or symbols does not establish genuine alignment. A course may be labelled as contributing to an outcome without specifying what students learn, how deeply they engage with it, or how achievement is assessed.

Effective mapping should indicate the developmental sequence through which an outcome is introduced, reinforced, practised, assessed, and ultimately demonstrated at the graduate level. It should also reveal unnecessary duplication and unaddressed outcomes.

For example, several courses may claim to develop communication competence, yet none may include a direct assessment of a professional presentation, stakeholder consultation, or written management communication. Similarly, data-informed decision-making may appear throughout the curriculum while students rarely work with authentic datasets.

6.3. Misalignment among outcomes, teaching, and assessment

Constructive alignment requires the intended learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment tasks to support each other. Misalignment occurs when programs claim to develop complex professional capabilities but rely predominantly on lectures and knowledge-based examinations.

Leadership cannot be demonstrated solely through recalling leadership theories. Strategic planning cannot be established through multiple-choice questions. Ethical decision-making cannot be inferred from attendance. Data analysis competence cannot be claimed when students have not interpreted actual data.

Authentic tasks may include institutional case analysis, policy briefs, program evaluation reports, simulated management meetings, quality improvement projects, internship portfolios, and capstone studies. These activities should not be added as decorative innovations. Each must be directly connected to specific outcomes and evaluated through clear criteria.

6.4. Limited assessment literacy

Assessment literacy refers to the ability to design, implement, interpret, and improve assessment. Lecturers need to understand validity, reliability, fairness, authenticity, workload, feedback, rubric design, and moderation. Program managers need to understand how course-level evidence can be aggregated and interpreted at program level.

Weak assessment literacy may result in tasks that do not measure the intended outcome, rubrics that use vague descriptors, inconsistent grading, or excessive reliance on student satisfaction as evidence. It may also lead to confusion between grades and outcome attainment.

A student can receive a passing grade in a course while failing to demonstrate a specific program outcome if the course grade combines attendance, group work, quizzes, and unrelated tasks. Programs need clear rules for identifying which assessment components provide direct evidence of each outcome.

6.5. Challenges in authentic assessment

Authentic assessment offers stronger evidence of professional capability but is more demanding than conventional examinations. It requires realistic tasks, detailed criteria, assessor training, moderation, and sufficient time. Group projects may conceal individual performance. Internship assessments may vary across host organizations. Case studies may become predictable if reused repeatedly.

These challenges do not justify avoiding authentic assessment. They require stronger design. Group tasks should include identifiable individual contributions. Internship evaluations should use common criteria and multiple evidence sources. Capstone projects should be reviewed for equivalence in complexity. Assessors should discuss sample work and calibrate standards.

6.6. Fragmented stakeholder participation

Educational Management programs serve diverse stakeholders, including students, alumni, schools, universities, government agencies, employers, professional organizations, and communities. Stakeholder consultation is therefore essential for evaluating program relevance.

However, consultation may become procedural. Institutions may distribute questionnaires, record meetings, and report general satisfaction without showing how the findings affected decisions. Broad questions such as whether a curriculum is appropriate rarely generate useful evidence.

Employers should be asked which competencies are required, which weaknesses are observed among graduates, and which emerging responsibilities should be addressed. Alumni should be asked how the program supported or failed to support their professional transition. Students should provide evidence on curriculum sequencing, workload, assessment, feedback, and support. Academic experts should evaluate disciplinary currency.

Stakeholder views should be triangulated. Employers may prioritize immediate workplace performance, while academic staff may emphasize conceptual depth and long-

term development. Quality assurance requires interpretation rather than automatic acceptance of every suggestion.

6.7. Fragmented information systems

Quality assurance depends on reliable information, but program data may be dispersed across training offices, faculties, examination units, student services, quality assurance centres, alumni units, and digital platforms. Fragmentation makes it difficult to connect admission characteristics, academic progression, assessment performance, learning outcome attainment, internship results, graduation, employment, and alumni development.

Ta and Pham's investigation of internal quality assurance tools and processes in Vietnamese universities highlights the importance of systematic mechanisms for continuous improvement [12]. Their findings indicate that the use of quality assurance tools varies and that institutions need stronger integration between processes and improvement.

The problem is not merely technological. Even an advanced information system produces poor evidence when data definitions are inconsistent. Terms such as employment, relevant employment, dropout, retention, stakeholder satisfaction, and outcome attainment require standardized definitions. Response rates and missing data must also be reported.

6.8. Confusing data with evidence

Institutions may collect large quantities of data without generating useful evidence. Data become evidence only when their relevance, validity, completeness, and limitations are understood.

Student satisfaction is valuable for identifying perceptions but does not directly establish learning. High satisfaction may coexist with weak academic challenge. Employment rates may indicate labour-market transition but require clear definitions and reliable follow-up. Course grades summarize performance but may not measure particular program outcomes.

Programs should collect a limited and coherent set of indicators linked to actual decisions. Each indicator should have a definition, responsible unit, collection schedule, analysis method, reporting destination, and expected response.

6.9. Uneven internal quality assurance capacity

Internal quality assurance requires expertise distributed throughout the institution. A central quality assurance unit cannot independently guarantee the quality of every program. Program leaders and lecturers must be capable of interpreting standards, designing evidence, analysing results, and implementing improvement.

Pham's case study of internal quality assurance in academic programs found an association between internal quality assurance systems and continuous program improvement while also identifying implementation conditions and limitations [13]. The study reinforces the view that procedures are effective only when they influence program-level decision-making.

Quality assurance staff may also experience role ambiguity, limited authority, heavy workloads, and dependence on academic units for evidence. Nguyen's research on internal challenges faced by quality assurance personnel highlights the importance of institutional support, professional capability, and cooperation [14].

6.10. Quality culture and resistance

Quality assurance may be resisted when lecturers perceive it as bureaucratic, punitive, or disconnected from teaching. Resistance is not always irrational. Institutions sometimes request large volumes of duplicated documentation without explaining its use. Staff may therefore comply formally while remaining disengaged.

Quality leaders must distinguish necessary evidence from administrative excess. Procedures should be simplified where they do not support decisions. At the same time, claims of bureaucracy should not become an excuse for avoiding accountability. Academic freedom does not remove the obligation to demonstrate that students learn.

6.11. Academic staff quality and workload

Academic staff are central to program quality. Their disciplinary expertise, teaching competence, professional experience, research activity, and assessment literacy affect every component of the program.

A recent analysis examined academic staff standards across 1,605 accredited higher education programs in Vietnam and found variation by institutional and disciplinary characteristics [15]. The study demonstrates the importance of looking beyond formal staffing requirements to consider distribution, sufficiency, and program-specific needs.

Educational Management programs require lecturers with different but complementary profiles. Excessive dependence on a small number of staff creates risks for course continuity, supervision, research, and curriculum development. Staff development should include disciplinary knowledge, pedagogy, assessment, digital competence, research, and engagement with professional practice.

Workload is also critical. Quality assurance activities require time for curriculum mapping, moderation, stakeholder consultation, data analysis, and improvement. Institutions cannot demand substantive quality assurance

while treating it as invisible work added to existing teaching and administrative obligations.

6.12. Accreditation-centred implementation

One of the most persistent risks is the treatment of accreditation as a temporary project. Committees may be established, documents standardized, and evidence collected shortly before external review. After recognition, attention may decline.

Dinh and Bui's analysis of quality assurance policy and practice in Vietnam identified gaps between formal policy development and implementation [16]. Their work suggests that accreditation should be connected to sustainable institutional systems rather than episodic compliance.

Accreditation is a mechanism for evaluating quality, not a substitute for quality. Retrospective evidence collection makes it difficult to demonstrate continuous monitoring or the impact of improvement. The fundamental problem is not missing documentation but the absence of an embedded improvement cycle.

7. An Integrated Framework for Quality Assurance

7.1. Quality governance and culture

The first dimension concerns governance, authority, responsibility, and institutional values. The university should define responsibilities for program approval, monitoring, review, and improvement. Roles among university leaders, faculties, program directors, course coordinators, quality assurance staff, and support units should be explicit.

The program should maintain a quality plan linked to institutional strategy. The plan should identify objectives, indicators, risks, responsibilities, timelines, and reporting arrangements. Quality governance should avoid both excessive centralization and uncontrolled decentralization.

Quality culture should encourage honest identification of problems. Staff should not be punished for presenting valid evidence of weakness. However, openness must be accompanied by responsibility. Improvement actions require owners, deadlines, resources, and evaluation.

7.2. Stakeholder-responsive program objectives

Program objectives should reflect institutional mission, disciplinary identity, national priorities, and stakeholder needs. They should describe the professional and social contributions expected of graduates several years after completion.

Objectives should be reviewed using evidence from policy analysis, labour-market developments, employer consultation, alumni experience, student feedback, and academic expertise. The review should examine whether

the objectives remain appropriate, not merely whether stakeholders agree with current wording.

Educational Management programs should consider competencies in leadership, administration, policy, planning, quality assurance, data analysis, digital governance, communication, ethics, inclusion, and organizational learning. Not every program must emphasize all areas equally, but its profile should be explicit and defensible.

7.3. Outcome-based curriculum design

Expected learning outcomes should translate program objectives into assessable graduate performance. They should integrate knowledge, cognitive skills, professional competence, digital capability, communication, autonomy, and ethical responsibility.

Each outcome should be mapped across the curriculum according to developmental levels. Introductory courses may establish concepts, intermediate courses may develop application, and advanced courses may require independent analysis and judgement. The final stage should include integrated assessment.

Curriculum review should identify duplication, gaps, weak sequencing, and excessive workload. Courses should not be retained solely because they have always been taught. Each course must contribute clearly to the graduate profile.

7.4. Learner-centred teaching and authentic assessment

Teaching methods should correspond to the nature of the learning outcomes. Lectures remain useful for conceptual foundations but should be complemented by cases, simulations, projects, field studies, policy analysis, problem-based learning, and professional practice.

Assessment should be valid, reliable, fair, and sufficiently authentic. Programs should develop assessment blueprints connecting outcomes, tasks, criteria, and evidence. Rubrics should describe observable levels of performance rather than use vague labels.

Assessment moderation should occur before and after implementation. Before assessment, lecturers should review task clarity, relevance, difficulty, and criteria. After assessment, they should examine grade distributions, student work, marker consistency, and outcome attainment.

Feedback should help students understand both current performance and future improvement. Delayed or generic feedback has limited educational value.

7.5. Academic staff and learning resources

The program should maintain an appropriate number and profile of academic staff. Staffing analysis should consider

disciplinary coverage, professional experience, teaching allocation, supervision, research, and continuity.

Professional development should be based on identified needs. Priorities may include outcome-based education, assessment literacy, digital pedagogy, data analysis, curriculum design, professional engagement, and research supervision.

Learning resources should support the actual curriculum. Relevant resources include current academic literature, legal databases, policy documents, educational datasets, management software, digital platforms, case materials, and field-learning opportunities.

Resource quality should be evaluated through access, use, and contribution to learning. The purchase of software or databases does not constitute improvement if students and staff do not use them effectively.

7.6. Evidence-based monitoring

The program should establish a coherent monitoring system covering admission, progression, retention, assessment, outcome attainment, internship, graduation, employment, alumni development, stakeholder feedback, and improvement.

Indicators should be limited to those supporting decisions. Quantitative data should be analysed over time and, where appropriate, disaggregated by relevant student groups. Qualitative evidence should be used to explain patterns.

Direct evidence of learning should receive particular attention. Surveys and satisfaction data are useful but indirect. Student work evaluated against program-level criteria provides stronger evidence of outcome attainment.

7.7. Continuous improvement and accountability

Improvement should follow a traceable cycle: identification of a problem, analysis of causes, selection of intervention, allocation of responsibility, implementation, evaluation of results, and subsequent standardization or revision.

Programs should distinguish activities from outcomes. Revising a syllabus, conducting a workshop, or purchasing software is an activity. Improved curriculum coherence, stronger student performance, or more reliable assessment is an outcome.

An improvement register should document the evidence that initiated an action, the underlying cause, responsible person, timeline, expected outcome, indicator, result, and decision.

Public accountability should include accurate disclosure of program objectives, learning outcomes, curriculum, staff, accreditation status, and other required information. Transparency should help learners and stakeholders make

informed judgements rather than function merely as legal compliance.

8. Discussion

Vietnam has developed a progressively structured framework for higher education quality assurance. The combination of autonomy legislation, program standards, undergraduate education regulations, revised accreditation requirements, and oversight of accreditation organizations provides a stronger formal foundation than existed during the early development of the national quality assurance system.

However, formal development does not automatically produce educational effectiveness. The central implementation gap lies between documentation and evidence of learning. Programs may possess approved objectives, curriculum maps, stakeholder surveys, course files, and improvement plans without demonstrating that graduates consistently attain the intended professional competence.

The problem is particularly serious for Educational Management programs because they prepare future educational decision-makers. Their graduates may later design policies, manage schools, organize accreditation, evaluate staff, or interpret institutional data. The program itself should therefore model the practices it teaches.

The proposed framework emphasizes integration. Clear learning outcomes are ineffective if assessment is invalid. Stakeholder feedback has limited value if it does not influence decisions. Data systems are ineffective if managers cannot interpret evidence. Accreditation has limited impact if improvement stops after recognition.

The framework is consistent with research showing that quality assurance in Vietnam requires institutional capacity, internal ownership, quality culture, and continuous improvement rather than formal compliance alone [7, 8, 12, 13, 16]. It also reflects the World Bank's assessment that governance, quality assurance, and system performance are interconnected priorities in Vietnamese higher education [17].

Student experience should remain an important but carefully interpreted dimension. Research on higher education service quality in Vietnam indicates that academic staff, facilities, service capacity, educational activities, student support, and programs influence student satisfaction [18]. Satisfaction evidence can identify weaknesses in delivery and support, but it should be triangulated with direct evidence of learning and professional outcomes.

Quality assurance should also remain proportionate. Excessive documentation consumes staff time and may

reduce engagement. Institutions should eliminate duplicated forms and low-value reporting. However, simplification should not remove essential evidence. The objective is not less quality assurance but more useful quality assurance.

9. Implications for Practice and Policy

Higher education institutions should integrate program quality assurance into routine academic governance. Annual monitoring should focus on a coherent set of indicators, major risks, learning outcome attainment, stakeholder evidence, and the effectiveness of previous improvement.

Program leaders should strengthen curriculum mapping and assessment design. Every expected learning outcome should be linked to specific courses, learning activities, assessment tasks, criteria, and evidence. Claims concerning graduate competence should rely on direct assessment.

Academic staff development should include assessment literacy, outcome-based curriculum design, authentic learning, data interpretation, and digital competence. Quality assurance work should be recognized in workload and performance systems.

Universities should develop integrated data governance. Indicator definitions, data ownership, access, validation, reporting schedules, and decision rules should be standardized. Sensitive student and staff data should be managed ethically.

Accreditation organizations should continue emphasizing educational outcomes and improvement. Guidance should discourage excessive evidence accumulation and require programs to demonstrate how data produced decisions and measurable results.

Policymakers should support sector-wide development of quality assurance personnel, program leaders, and academic staff. Quality assurance cannot be sustained solely through regulations. It requires professional competence, stable systems, and institutional trust.

Future research should examine Educational Management programs empirically. Multi-institutional studies could investigate curriculum alignment, assessment practices, employer expectations, graduate competence, data systems, and improvement outcomes. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable because program quality cannot be understood fully through a single accreditation event.

10. Conclusion

Quality assurance in Educational Management programs is strategically important because these programs prepare professionals whose decisions may influence the performance of educational institutions and the wider

education system. Vietnam has established an increasingly comprehensive regulatory environment linking autonomy, accountability, program standards, internal quality assurance, external accreditation, and transparency.

The major challenge is no longer simply the absence of procedures. It is the risk that procedures become disconnected from learning and professional competence. Ambiguous outcomes, superficial curriculum mapping, limited authentic assessment, weak assessment literacy, fragmented data, procedural stakeholder consultation, uneven staff capacity, and accreditation-centred implementation reduce the effectiveness of quality assurance.

Educational Management programs should adopt an integrated approach based on seven dimensions: quality governance and culture, stakeholder-responsive objectives, outcome-based curriculum design, learner-centred teaching and authentic assessment, academic staff and learning resources, evidence-based monitoring, and continuous improvement with accountability.

The credibility of quality assurance should ultimately be judged not by the number of documents produced or the acquisition of accreditation status, but by the program's capacity to demonstrate that students develop the knowledge, competence, judgement, and ethical responsibility required for effective educational management. Quality assurance becomes meaningful when reliable evidence changes decisions and when those decisions produce verifiable improvement.

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