

RESPONSES OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN VIETNAM DURING THE TIME OF COVID-19

Nguyen Thi Thuy Trang

Academy of Finance
Email: nguyenthuytrang@hvtc.edu.vn

Received: 15/4/2020
Reviewed: 07/5/2020
Revised: 15/5/2020
Accepted: 12/6/2020
Released: 21/6/2020

DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.25073/0866-773X/420>

Coronavirus (Covid-19) has spread to almost every country worldwide. As of April 28th, 2020 Vietnam has recorded 270 coronavirus cases and no Covid-19-caused death; however, education in Vietnam has been significantly affected. As no anti-Covid19 vaccine has been developed and the coronavirus difficulty time continues, it will be up to higher educational institutions to continually review and improve their unusual difficult situation management strategies and initiatives. This study seeks to answer the following questions: (i) What are the impacts of Covid-19 on higher educational institutions in Vietnam? (ii) What are the progress made with regards to unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam during the time of Covid-19? The results of this study reveal the current state of unusual difficult situation management in the higher educational institutions in Vietnam and the key areas that should be addressed as part of institution's unusual difficult situation management plan during and after the difficulty time of Covid-19.

Keywords: Coronavirus (Covid-19); Higher educational institutions; Responses; Unusual difficult situation.

1. Introduction

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that range from the common cold to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The most recent coronavirus (sometimes referred to as the novel coronavirus) is called COVID-19, and was first detected in Wuhan, China in December of 2019. Since its first cases in China, COVID-19 has spread to almost every country worldwide. According to the official website of Vietnam's Ministry of Health (ncov.moh.gov.vn), up to now Vietnam has recorded no death due to Covid-19; however, education in Vietnam has been significantly affected due to early closure and social distancing. In the beginning of February 2020, after the Lunar New Year holidays, very few higher educational institutions in Vietnam got students back to their campus while most of the institutions had closed campuses. Until now, students have returned to school to continue studying, but the consequences of this pandemic still remain.

The global higher education landscape has dramatically changed in the past few months due to the spread of the coronavirus (otherwise known as COVID-19). An accompanying survey that targeted higher education professionals and academics in

universities across the country has attracted 69 respondents in order to explore findings, including the impact of Covid-19 on student recruitment, online learning offerings, campus management, and a range of other areas.

2. Research overview

The coronavirus outbreak has been labelled a pandemic by the WHO and has been a source of socio-economic, health and mortality crisis globally, hence the need to examine the impact of Covid-19 on higher education. The case of global higher education has been introduced by Quacquarelli Symonds, a British company specializing in the analysis of higher education institutions around the world, (*Survey on Impact of Coronavirus on Global Higher Education*, March 2020), illustrating an overall picture of how global higher education got affected by Covid-19 without a focus on any nation's higher education. That is, the case of higher education in Vietnam is out of the survey. Nevertheless, this paper provides a closer look at how Vietnam's higher educational institutions respond to the unpredictable changes during the time of Covid-19. Due to the aforementioned, it is imperative that a general examination is done to investigate the impact of Covid-19 on

higher educational institutions in Vietnam and the responses of higher educational institutions in Vietnam during the time of Covid-19.

The study aimed at investigating the impact of Covid-19 on higher educational institutions in Vietnam and highlighting the progress made with regards to unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam. Also, this study seeks to answer the following questions: (i) What are the impacts of Covid-19 on higher educational institutions in Vietnam? (ii) What are the progress made with regards to unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam?

The study set two research hypothesis:

(HO1) There is no significant relationship of Covid-19 on higher educational institutions in Vietnam;

(HO2) There is no significant relationship between Covid-19 and unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam.

This study would be carried out on the Vietnam scene at large. It will focus solely on the impact of Covid-19 on unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam. Recommendation that will promote sustainable educational development will be made based on the findings of this study. The findings in this study will be of immense importance in many ways. To the policy makers in Ministry of Education and Training as well as to the higher education management, necessary solutions mapped out would help higher educational institutions to get back to their feet and/ or even go further faster in the face of an unforeseeable scenario.

3. Research methods

The study is conducted through analysis and synthesis of data gathered from primary and secondary sources. Primary data will be from interviews and surveys. Secondary sources will be collected from reports and published materials. This study also refers to the government policies, official magazines on the topics relevant to the study from various institutions and universities in Vietnam.

The study is carried out with some group interviews and survey design. In this qualitative research, the implementation of online learning and business management through independent variables will be monitored, and acquisition about learning goals and learner's motivation as dependent variables will be measured. The central point in the

study is unusual difficult situation management in the time of Covid-19. Interviews and surveys will be designed differently and purposely for different groups. Therefore, the survey focuses on the progress made with regards to unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam.

There are two basic classifications of samples as follows: Non-probability - where all respondents of the investigation are not selected through equal chances; Probability - Commonly understood that each member of the population has an equal chance of becoming a part of the sample. The researcher has to choose non-probability design based on prediction and convenience because different groups of interview and survey participants should be treated differently per certain purposes for the study. The research instruments are online questionnaires and check-list for interviews via zoom. Interviews will be conducted among 69 academics and university professionals as representatives from different higher educational institutions in Vietnam. Because the total population is large (237 as of August 2019 according to Report by Department of Higher Education), the researcher has to determine the sample size by using Slovin's formula.

4. Research results

4.1. How are institutions responding to this global health emergency?

Universities in Vietnam have been forced to close campuses and many of them (78%) switched to online learning and digital tools in the wake of the coronavirus while the rest (22%) patiently were waiting for the re-opening of their campuses for on-site learning and teaching. Almost all universities (95% of respondents) are facing challenges during this time while maintaining consistent course delivery, ensuring strong student recruitment numbers, and providing clear communication to staffs and students. The following are challenges university professionals facing during this time:

- ✓ Keeping our current students, faculty, and staff safe and healthy while also trying to keep normal operations running, avoiding panic (94%)
- ✓ Concerned about enrollment for next school year (94%)
- ✓ Facing fake news (28%)
- ✓ Not well prepared for this time (33%)
- ✓ Challenges in moving from traditional education to e-learning (72%)
- ✓ Challenges in overcoming the problem of

practical courses and training in e-learning (86%)

- ✓ The uncertainty (94%)
- ✓ The communication difficulties (94%)
- ✓ Difficulties in continuity planning (48%)
- ✓ Maintaining educational progress with innovative educational solutions, like going online (78%)
- ✓ The financial difficulties (lack of proper facilities) preventing students from attending online lectures (87%)
- ✓ Internet access limit preventing students from attending online lectures properly (80%)

4.2. What tactics have universities adopted in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak?

This new normal has made universities implemented a range of measures to face these challenges.

Online learning

78% of the survey respondents had switched their scheduled courses online as the coronavirus continues and Ministry of Education and Training guided them to do so. Only 6% switched online right after the invasion of Covid-19 in the beginning of February, 2020. Academy of Finance is one of the example for this quick switch.

Student recruitment addressing

Ministry of Education and Training just announced a major change in the exit examination for high school students few days back in April end, when the school campuses are still being closed. Accordingly, universities have their own ways of recruiting students for the school year 2020-2021. However, the majority of universities (75%) have recently affirmed that they will not carry out a separate entrance exam. Only the minority of universities (25%) will conduct an entrance exam for their specific majors. That is, universities would find their own way to deal with student recruitment issues smoothly.

Unusual difficult situation management plan review

66% out of the respondents say that their institutions have a management plan for unpredictable scenarios while 24% don't and 10% didn't know if their institution had a plan. This demonstrates that the majority of institutions understand the importance of unusual difficult situation management, have implemented a unusual difficult situation management plan, and view it as effective (for some they only see it as 'moderately

effective'). This will only become more important as the current global health emergency continues.

When asked for their thoughts on the higher education sector's approach to unusual difficult situation management and the coronavirus, many respondents emphasized the importance of:

- ✓ Online learning (97%)
- ✓ International coordination and collaboration (80%)
- ✓ Proactive, preventative measures (88%)
- ✓ Strong university leadership (98%)
- ✓ Flexibility for assessment deadlines and exams (84%)
- ✓ Stricter sanitation initiatives (72%)
- ✓ Clear communication from university leadership and administrators (81%)

4.3. How do institutions understand the students' responses to the coronavirus situation?

Students across the higher education sector have been dramatically impacted by the spread of the coronavirus, from travel restrictions to social distancing, isolation measures, quarantines, campus closures, and border closures. 78% of the survey respondents had switched their scheduled courses online as the coronavirus continues and Ministry of Education and Training guided them to do so while 29% of students stated that they had no interest in studying online (according to the other survey by the author of this study).

N.H.N, a third-year languages student at the Academy of Finance, said the university was quick to switch the scheduled courses online, impose strict measures, including suspending classes and closing dormitories. She said: "I think my university is doing the best they can. PowerPoints, course summaries, pre-recorded lectures are all very effective ways to help." "In my case, because I study languages, I was given different translations to do at home, and now instead of turning them in in class, I send them to my lecturers via email, google drive, google classrooms and they send them back to me graded. It's a very efficient system."

Is there a different view from institutions' perspective? Did institutions carry out any survey on the students' responses to online learning issues in the coronavirus situation?

- ✓ Not carried out any survey (65%)
- ✓ Carried out a comprehensive survey on total population (6%)
- ✓ Carried out a survey on sample of

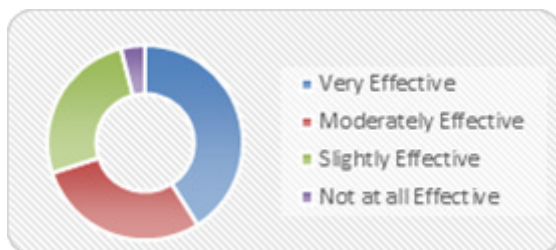
population (26%)

- ✓ Collected responses via institutions' fanpages, youth union's and student association's facebook (74%)

Institutions had applied online tools and platforms to implement mid-term assessment which accounted for a certain portion out of the course grade. In contrast, how to conduct final exams for each subject is still not yet decided. 88% of respondents said their institutions have some options and are waiting for the re-open of the campus to get back to traditional assessment methods. This is because of their understanding the low readiness of students to take other forms of assessment rather than traditional ones, institutions are keeping themselves open and flexible during the outbreak of coronavirus.

4.4. The effectiveness of unusual difficult situation management in the higher education sector

Opinions of respondents on the effectiveness of their institution's unusual difficult situation management plan varied as shown in the following chart:



Source: author

As can be seen, the majority of institutions understand the importance of unusual difficult situation management, have implemented a unusual difficult situation management plan, and view it as effective. This will only become more important as the current global health emergency continues.

Answering the question 'What to do during a tough situation', the results showed:

- ✓ Disseminating accurate information (94% of respondents),
- ✓ Ensuring strong communication (88%),
- ✓ Complying with regulations (100%),
- ✓ Staying flexible (75%),
- ✓ Maintaining collaboration and research engagements (79%) and
- ✓ Providing mental health and emotional support (43%).

To the question 'What to do after a tough situation',

- ✓ Listening to students and staff (88%),
- ✓ Assessing the ripple effects of the crisis (91%) and
- ✓ Identifying weaknesses and areas of improvement (59%).

To the question 'Looking towards the future':

- ✓ Rebuilding institution's brand and reputation (51%) and
- ✓ Implementing international and national recruitment strategies (91%)

5. Discussion

As mentioned in the other survey by the author of this study, 71% of domestic students expressed some interest in studying their degree online due to coronavirus restrictions, while only 29% stated that they had no interest in studying online. Additionally, 57% of students said that they expect universities provide sufficient online platforms and move to more of their lectures online. To help universities across the globe, companies like iTeach.world, Rafr, Aula, Google, Zoom, Microsoft and Intergreat are offering remote teaching tools and online platforms free of charge. The companies noted the challenge for some students is internet bandwidth. Everybody is being put online but, in some countries, and some areas, the internet just isn't what it should be for this type of thing. This is affecting some students' and teachers' experience. The massive move to online is forcing the education system to figure out how to drive engagement at scale in their courses. This has created a special window for information technology companies to leverage their experience in supporting institutions. The author believe that the coronavirus will force educators to revolutionize the way they teach, moving from a lecture-listen model to an interactive, learn-by-doing model. Meanwhile the fact that information technology companies get themselves suited well with the new wave will provide new offerings for the revolution in higher education. Therefore, it would be likely smooth in terms of technology for institutions to move to online learning in accordance with sufficient financial investment.

Other related issues would be stated as institutions' investment in online teaching and learning activities as well as assessment of online approaches and methods. Professional courses and training would be offered to academics, professionals and staff, aiming at resolving

difficulties and challenges in online learning and teaching, especially for providing skill training and courses to students. In addition, surveys and studies on student difficulties and challenges in online learning method would be implemented to find solutions and/or initiatives for the moving to the online model.

Ministry of Education and Training just announced a major change in the exit examination for high school students on 29th April, 2020, when the school campuses are still being closed. Accordingly, universities have their own ways of recruiting students for the school year 2020-2021. However, with travel restrictions and closed borders, parents' financial situation would likely go worse. As a result, it affects the high school student choice of university in regards to tuition fees. In addition to that, worries about the new normal of the online model in higher educational institutions would also contribute to the high school student choice. Many of the challenges listed above mention the pressing concerns that university professionals have around hitting student recruitment targets.

To institutional management: Once the tough situation due to Covid-19 has passed and the ripple effects have ceased, it's time to consider the long-term outlook for institutions. Here are a few simple steps that institutions can take as part of their long-term unusual difficult situation management plan:

- ✓ Identify concerns: Speak to prospective and current students to determine what may discourage them from attending your institution
- ✓ Address these issues: Plan and implement real change that will help to resolve these issues
- ✓ Communicate these changes: Make sure prospective students know about the steps you've taken to address their concerns

Ongoing unusual difficult situation like the coronavirus should motivate higher educational institutions to think outside the box. Traditional source markets and resources that institutions may have relied on in the past may be severely impacted, and new markets, new resources and new approaches may respectively emerge. Remain flexible and continuously review the student recruitment strategy as well as teaching approaches and methods. Higher educational institutions are sophisticated, interconnected systems, involving networks of individuals and communities from across the country that rely on each other to function effectively.

To the ministerial management: Policies and initiatives related to online education should be issued as soon as possible. Ministerial guidelines on assessment methods and quality control would play an important role in improving unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam. Accordingly, higher educational institutions would develop their management plan aiming at achieving their scheduled educational goals. Furthermore, other relevant requirements on infrastructure such as internet access, information security, personal privacy, etc. should be soon examined to support education sector.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the significant relationship of Covid-19 on higher education in Vietnam is not deniable. Higher educational institutions are quite vulnerable in the face of such a stunning period like the coronavirus, as most universities are big community groups that once affected will lead to great spreading. However, with the support of the internet and related technologies, it gives universities a chance to reconsider how to actively use technology to develop their courses via online methods. This is a great opportunity to get used to using distance learning techniques. Higher educational institutions should get themselves prepared for any other stunning situation in the future.

There is also significant relationship between Covid-19 and unusual difficult situation management in higher educational institutions in Vietnam. As the coronavirus pandemic continues, it will be up to institutions to continually review and improve their unusual difficult situation management strategies and initiatives. It's important to remember that flexibility and the ability to quickly adapt to changing difficulty conditions will serve higher educational institutions well in the coming months. Developing a detailed and rigorously tested unusual difficult situation management plan will help institutions respond to threats in the most efficient way, returning to business as usual without any issues escalating.

The limitation of this study placed on the sample size and 10% of probability of error committed due to the use of sample instead of population. Accordingly, it would be recommended that a further study on the population should be done by either the author or any interest in the short run to come up with comprehensive findings and in-depth understanding of the issue.

References

- Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Training, *Annual Report 2019*;
- Ministry of Education and Training, *Announcement on National Graduation Examination Plan*, 22nd April 2020;
- Ministry of Education and Training, *Report on Comprehensive Reforms on Education for the period of 2013-2018*;
- Official sub-website of Ministry of Health, <https://ncov.moh.gov.vn>, 17:00 April 30th, 2020;
- Quacquarelli Symonds, *Survey on Impact of Coronavirus on Global Higher Education*, March 2020;
- Trang. N. T. T, *Research on Students' Responses to Online Learning during Coronavirus Crisis*, March 2020, Academy of Finance;
- World Health Organization, *Definitions of Covid-19 and Pandemic*, 2020.
-

ỨNG PHÓ CỦA CÁC CƠ SỞ GIÁO DỤC ĐẠI HỌC VIỆT NAM TRONG THỜI KỲ DỊCH BỆNH COVID-19

Nguyễn Thị Thùy Trang

Học viện Tài chính

Email: nguyenthuytrang@hvtc.edu.vn

Received: 15/4/2020

Reviewed: 07/5/2020

Revised: 15/5/2020

Accepted: 12/6/2020

Released: 21/6/2020

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.25073/0866-773X/420>

Tóm tắt

Vi rút corona chủng mới (Covid-19) đã lây lan tới hầu như tất cả các quốc gia trên thế giới. Tại Việt Nam đến nay đã ghi nhận trên 300 ca dương tính với Covid-19 và chưa ghi nhận ca tử vong nào do Covid-19 gây ra; tuy nhiên, giáo dục Việt Nam đã bị ảnh hưởng nghiêm trọng. Tình hình dịch bệnh trên thế giới vẫn còn diễn biến phức tạp, khi chưa có vắc xin phòng bệnh do virut Covid-19 gây ra nên các cơ sở giáo dục đại học, cao đẳng vẫn cần tiếp tục rà soát, đánh giá và nâng cấp các giải pháp và chiến lược ứng phó với tình huống khó khăn bất thường này. Bài nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm câu trả lời cho hai câu hỏi sau: (i) tác động của Covid-19 đến các cơ sở giáo dục đại học Việt Nam như thế nào? (ii) Các cơ sở giáo dục đại học Việt Nam đã có những thay đổi gì để ứng phó với tình hình khó khăn bất thường do Covid-19 gây ra? Kết quả của nghiên cứu này nêu ra tình hình thực trạng hiện nay tại các cơ sở giáo dục đại học Việt Nam trong việc ứng phó với những khó khăn bất thường do Covid-19 gây ra và chỉ ra các vấn đề cần lưu ý khi các cơ sở giáo dục đại học lập kế hoạch ứng phó với những tình huống khó khăn bất thường trong và sau khi đại dịch Covid-19 qua đi.

Từ khóa

Cơ sở giáo dục đại học; Khó khăn bất thường; Vi rút corona (Covid-19); Phản ứng; Tình huống khó khăn bất thường.