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## A linguistic analysis of social attitudes towards the quality issues of postgraduate education in Vietnam

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#### **Abstract**

This paper proposes the PhD project A linguistic study on social attitudes towards the quality of postgraduate education in Vietnam. The study uses Appraisal theory as the framework to analyse interviews with different stakeholders involved in the postgraduate education sector, namely bureaucrats, management, academics and students. The study aims to find out:

- What the stakeholders' perceived quality issues in relation to MA and PhD education in Vietnam are
- Who the stakeholders' believe to bear the responsibility for the quality issues are.

Taking into account the facts that the quality of postgraduate education in Vietnam is in question and the fact that the Minister of Education and Training has recently urged an increase in the number of MA and PhD holders in education sectors, this study is significant in the sense that it will provide explanations for some of the problems concerning the quality of postgraduate education in Vietnam as well as thoughts for changes to improve the present situation.

**Keyword**: Educational Policy, Administration and Management, Attitudes and Practices in postgraduate education, Appraisal theory, Systemic Functional Linguistics

#### 1. Introduction

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been witnessing changes in education trends in Vietnam. More and more people are furthering their study to a Masters or even a PhD to satisfy the requirements of recruiters. According to statistics by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) (Ministry of Education and Training 2006), at present, there are approximately 32,205 academic staff at education and training institutions, around 30% of whom hold an MA and 17% hold a PhD degree (Ministry of Education and Training 2006). The situation of higher degree study is becoming more "heated" due to the urging of the current Minister of Education and Training for higher education institutions in Vietnam to increase the number of PhD holders to 19,000 by the year 2015. This means that approximately 40% of academic staff will have to hold an MA and 25%, a PhD by then. These ratios are expected to rise to 60% and 35% respectively in 2020.

In the wake of the Minister's statement, many people worry that there is a race for quantity that will give rise to counterfeit and low quality outcomes.

#### 2. Research questions

The study aims to find out the stakeholders' views by answering the following questions:

- What are the practices of MA and PhD education in academic institutions?
- What are the stakeholders' perceived quality issues of postgraduate education in Vietnam?
- According to the stakeholders, who should bear the most responsibility for the quality issues?
- What role do the stakeholders think they play in the system of postgraduate education in Vietnam?
- To what extent do the stakeholders think they are empowered to enact change?
- What changes are needed?

#### 3. Method

The project uses Appraisal theory (Martin and White 2005) as the framework to analyse interviews with different stakeholders involved in the postgraduate education sector, namely management, academics and students. The Appraisal analysis will look into 1) the attitude of the stakeholder (how they feel, how they judge others and what they think of the situation); 2) the engagement condition (the source of opinions, who says what); and 3) the degree of evaluation (how strongly they feel, how negatively/positively they judge etc).

#### 4. Results

After the appraisal analysis, the following generalizations can be drawn from the major stakeholders: education management, teachers (supervisors) and postgraduate students.

Discussed	management	teachers	students
items			
PG quality	low	low	low
the most	students	students	managers
responsible?			
difficulties	managing the present	teaching/supervising	studying while
	system is a hard job	with low salary is a	working is a hard job
		hard job	
domestically	not as good as	not good	not good
trained PhD	supposed to be		
holders			
problems	students, teachers, the	management,	unfair marking,
	system	policies, finance,	teaching method, and
		equipment, marking	courseware, the
		culture, English	motivation of studying
		qualification.	for a PG degree,
			facilities, training,
			English qualification,
			the management of the

			'brainy'
thesis quality	low	low	low
responsibility	students, teachers,	students	teachers, management
for thesis	and the system, not		
quality	management (!)		
cheating	aware and claim to	aware but ignore	aware but don't talk
	strictly punish		much about
Minister's plan	doubt but strong	support but doubt	most doubtful, least
	support		supportive
stakeholders'	talk least about	praise themselves by	all 3 groups of
role	themselves, students	talking about their	stakeholders are
	and teachers as most	effort, enthusiasm	supposed to have
	decisive	and achievement.	similar active roles in
			the quality issues but
			students should be the
			most responsible for
			their study.
suggestions for	mostly related to	management, finance,	facilities, int'l
improvement	management and	enabling conditions	cooperation, teaching
	teachers (human,	and policies,	method, training,
	effort, appropriate	international	regulation, foreign
	application of foreign	exchange, facilities,	language upgrading,
	education teaching	scholarship for	investment, teacher
	methods, courseware	students, overseas	training-talent
	content, enabling	training for teachers,	attraction, ISO
	conditions, facilities,	ignorance of personal	application, stricter
	international	relation, and	management, attitude
	cooperation,	improvement of	•
	enterprise investment,	foreign language	specialization.

	regulation, policies,	proficiency	
	and management)		
talking about	less direct	less direct	most direct
quality issues			
talking manner	implicit but very	explicit but less	explicit but less
	assertive	assertive	assertive

#### 5. Conclusion

In short, all the three sectors of interviewees admit that the quality of postgraduate education in Vietnam is low and worrying. However, the problems each group of stakeholders raise are various. While students emphasize on issues like motivation of study, facilities, and the management of the brainy, teachers are more concerned about management, finance, policies, and marking culture and the management complain about students, teachers, and especially the "system" as a whole. Both the interviewed management and teachers find students the most responsible for the quality issues while students blame the managers for the problem. Students also blame both the management and teachers for the poor quality of their theses.

While the management and teachers are less direct in talking about quality issues, the students sound more direct. Similarly, the managers use more implicit strategies while the teachers and students refer to the issues in a more explicit way. However, the managers appear to be the more assertive in discussing the problem than the other 2 groups of stakeholders.

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