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Quality Assurance in Preschool Teacher Training According to the Aun-Qa Approach

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Abstract: Ensuring the quality of teacher training programs is an important aspect of organizing higher education activities at universities and is the primary factor in improving the quality of school education. Currently, many countries around the world regard quality assurance in training programs as a crucial step in the educational reform process, contributing to the overall development of the nation. This article focuses on surveying and researching the content of quality assurance in pedagogical universities. The content of quality assurance in pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach covers all activities that these universities implement to maintain, improve, and enhance their training quality. Researching the AUN-QA approach for quality assurance in teacher training in general, and specifically in preschool teacher training, serves as a method to enhance training quality and plays an important role in the trends of internationalization, competition, and global cooperation in education. All these studies represent significant theoretical and practical findings that align with modern trends and the current requirements for fundamental and comprehensive reform in education and training. Therefore, identifying the research issue "Quality Assurance in Preschool Teacher Training According to the AUN-QA Approach" has highlighted new points and made direct contributions to improving the quality of preschool teacher training to meet societal needs and current international integration.

Keywords: Quality assurance, training programs, preschool education, AUN-QA, training quality, higher education, teachers, preschool teachers.

## 1.	Introduction

1.1. In the context of globalization and international integration, Vietnam's higher education sector faces both opportunities and challenges. To address these, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive strategy that emphasizes significant reforms aimed at enhancing training quality. This will improve competitiveness and facilitate integration into regional and global labor markets.

1.2. The 13th National Congress directed: "Continue to comprehensively renew the goals, content, programs, methods, and teaching methods in alignment with modern and internationally integrated standards... Strive to make Vietnamese education reach an advanced regional level by 2030" [1]. To achieve this, Vietnamese higher education must innovate to ensure the quality of preschool education programs to produce high-quality human resources essential for the country's industrialization and modernization. In addition to implementing the quality assurance regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training to meet national standards, universities need to approach and implement quality assurance according to international models to meet international standards.

1.3. According to the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Report, quality assurance in higher education is defined as "systematic management and evaluation processes to monitor the operations of higher education institutions, ensure the quality of outputs, and improve quality" (UNESCO, 2003). Ensuring the quality of preschool education programs according to the AUN-QA (ASEAN University Network - Quality Assurance) approach is a new direction that has significant interest and aligns closely with the training orientation of Vietnamese universities. However, there are still many theoretical issues that remain unclear regarding the application of AUN-QA to the quality assurance of preschool education programs in Vietnam.

2. Research Methodology

The author designed three survey questionnaires to investigate three target groups: preschool education department heads, specialists from provincial and municipal departments of education, and lecturers teaching preschool education. Specifically:

- Department Heads: 30 questionnaires (Select 10 universities nationwide that offer undergraduate training for preschool teachers).

- Lecturers: 100 questionnaires (lecturers involved in training undergraduate preschool teachers at universities nationwide, with 10 questionnaires from each university).

- Specialists: 50 questionnaires (5 questionnaires per department).

The selected locations for distributing questionnaires included:

- Universities: Hanoi National University of Education, Hanoi National University, Vinh University, Quang Binh University, Hong Duc University, Hue University of Education, Da Nang University of Education, Tay Nguyen University, Saigon University, and Ho Chi Minh City University of Education.

- Provinces: Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Hue, Hoa Binh, Da Nang, Khanh Hoa, and Ho Chi Minh City.

The survey results will serve as a crucial source of information for analyzing and gaining a realistic overview of the quality assurance content of preschool teacher training programs at universities according to the AUN-QA approach.

3. Research Content

3.1. Overview of research on quality assurance in preschool teacher training programs at universities

Quality assurance in teacher training programs is a crucial aspect of organizing and operating higher education institutions, serving as the primary factor in enhancing the quality of school education. Currently, many countries worldwide regard quality assurance in training programs as an important step in the educational reform process, contributing to the overall development of the nation.

Research on quality assurance for preschool teacher training according to the AUN-QA approach mainly focuses on issues such as: studies on the quality of teacher training; management of preschool teacher training programs; and quality management of preschool teacher training according to the AUN-QA approach at the program level.

3.1.1. Studies on quality assurance in higher education

Quality assurance is an activity aimed at providing products that meet the quality standards of the local, regional, and global labor markets in various fields. Therefore, ensuring quality in higher education has been a focus of research by educators both domestically and internationally.

Regarding quality assurance in higher education, author Warren Piper states: "Quality assurance in higher education is the sum of all mechanisms and processes applied to ensure predetermined quality or continuous quality improvement, including planning, identification, encouragement, evaluation, and quality control." In the context of the mission and vision of universities, quality assurance refers to processes with principles aimed at improving quality, with particular emphasis on key areas such as teaching, learning, research, and community service [16].

According to author R. Ellis (1993), quality assurance in education can be categorized into three groups: 1) The first group asserts that quality assurance is a system of established processes in education. External evaluations through programs, professional commitments, peer assessments, and even examination processes have long been used as quality assurance factors in teaching; 2) The second group contends that quality assurance represents a new approach to establishing and maintaining quality standards within educational institutions; 3) The third group takes an intermediary position, suggesting that while educational institutions have some existing quality

management processes, it is necessary to incorporate additional mechanisms and procedures that are more suitable for the new context of schools [8]

According to the International Organization for Higher Education Quality Assurance, "Quality assurance can relate to a program, an institution, or a general higher education system. In each case, quality assurance is all perspectives, subjects, activities, and processes that ensure that appropriate educational standards are being maintained and enhanced both within and beyond each program. Quality assurance also involves making standards and processes widely known to the educational community and the public."

Reports at conferences and seminars in developed countries such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Singapore have published many research results on teacher education quality. Notably, the first (2011) and third (2013) Education Summits in New York and Amsterdam, respectively, announced and shared experiences and results on teacher training and development to improve quality.

In the global trend of educational development, in recent years, quality assurance in higher education in Vietnam has been a focus of research. Some notable studies include:

According to author Nguyen Duc Hanh (2019), the quality assurance process begins at the planning stage, when an educational institution decides what to do and how to do it. A quality assurance plan must include criteria for assessing input quality, implementation processes, and output quality, with a focus on the quality of outcomes.[9].

From the results of research on the current state of quality assurance in Vietnamese universities, author Tran Anh Vu (2018) argues that quality assurance activities within universities have been given attention and have achieved relatively good results. However, given the current demands for educational reform and training, there are still many limitations and shortcomings. This requires universities to invest more in quality assurance activities, especially the need for practical solutions to effectively implement quality assurance activities within the institution [10].

Author Tran Linh Quan has identified the content and conditions necessary to ensure quality in vocational colleges in general and pedagogical colleges in particular in Vietnam, thereby proposing a quality assurance system with the following conditions: a catalog of activities necessary for ensuring quality across the factors of input-process-output;the procedures for these activities (guidelines for establishing processes); and a set of criteria for evaluating activity outcomes. [11].

Pham Le Cuong, in his research on "Solutions for Ensuring the Quality of Training in Pedagogical Universities/Departments," has proposed various solutions for enhancing training quality, such as developing a strategic plan for training quality and quality policies at pedagogical universities; improving the internal quality assurance system of these institutions, and establishing quality standards to continuously enhance training quality in pedagogical universities[2].

Nguyen Ngoc Tai, in his research on the role and position of quality management subjects in universities and colleges, highlighted that department heads, the training office, and the science and technology office play crucial roles, with department heads being the most important [4].

Nguyen Thi My Loc, in her research titled "A model of high-quality teacher training at the National University of Hanoi," has shown that the university trains teachers using an open model (3+1) within a multidisciplinary university like the National University of Hanoi or a (4+1) model, after graduating with a bachelor's degree in basic sciences, students can pursue an additional year of pedagogical training to obtain a corresponding bachelor's degree in education. [3].

3.1.2. Research on quality assurance in teacher training according to the AUN-QA approach

To develop human resources through higher education in the ASEAN region, the ASEAN University Network was established in 1995. To date, 27 universities from 10 countries in the region have become members of this organization. To promote internal quality assurance in universities in the region, AUN has initiated the assessment of higher education quality according to the common quality assurance standards of the ASEAN region (ASEAN

University Network - Quality Assurance, abbreviated as AUN-QA). This is also how the ASEAN University Network enhances mutual trust in the quality of training among universities in the region as well as with partner universities worldwide, gradually contributing to promoting the recognition of learning outcomes and developing cooperation among universities in Southeast Asia. Assessing the quality of training programs according to AUN standards aims to help institutions understand the level their training programs have reached on the regional assessment scale. Furthermore, it helps identify existing shortcomings in the program to ensure that the program achieves a quality comparable to similar programs in the ASEAN region.

Dai and Marquet conducted a statistical analysis comparing the significance of the assessment results of four training programs in Vietnam in 2009 and 2011 [6]. The article delved into the analysis of criteria related to the use of information and communication technology, highlighting the differences in perceptions between internal and external assessments of the training program. From there, the study supplements easily measurable criteria that are still compatible with existing criteria, contributing to increasing the reliability of the assessment results.

Phan Hung Thu, in his research titled "Managing High School Teacher Training Programs According to the AUN-QA Approach" has conducted in-depth research on the management of high school teacher training programs at pedagogical universities. He proposed management solutions for these programs following the AUN-QA approach to enhance the quality of high school teacher training, addressing the current demands for reform in general education in the current context [5].

Author Vuong Kim Thanh (2023) focused on the issue of managing the quality of primary school teacher training according to the AUN-QA approach. He argues that the application of the AUN-QA approach to quality management in primary school teacher training in Vietnam still has many theoretical issues that have not been clarified. Therefore, it is necessary to propose management solutions for ensuring the quality of primary school teachers according to the AUN-QA approach, contributing to enhancing the quality management of teachers to meet societal demands and facilitate international integration [12].

3.1.3. Research on the training and quality assurance of preschool education teachers following the AUN-QA approach

Quality assurance in preschool teacher training has been a focus of research in various aspects with many new studies in the context of the current global changes.

In the project "Competence Requirements in Preschool Education and Care" (CoRe) co-implemented by the University of East London (UEL) and Ghent University (UGent), they have identified competence requirements in preschool care and education (CoRe), including knowledge, skills, and attitudes, thereby determining the professionalism in preschool education, the conditions for developing, supporting, and maintaining competencies across all levels of the preschool system. According to CoRe, the core of professional competence lies in the ability to continuously connect the dimensions of knowledge, practice, and values through practical activities. The competence of preschool educators should be assessed based on their knowledge and adaptability in different practical conditions. These contents have been discussed with the participation of 14 member countries, which have provided recommendations for policies aimed at promoting professionalism in preschool teacher training. These recommendations include enhancing training processes, quality management, and research to improve training quality for preschool educators regarding qualification requirements and the diversity of approaches to implement them across Europe [13].

Since 2014, with the support of UNESCO, SEAMEO, and funding from the Japanese government, Southeast Asian countries have initiated a project aimed at "Developing Preschool Educators in Southeast Asia". The project emphasizes that to improve the quality of training and professional development for preschool teachers, it is essential to focus on the quality of training programs, teaching methods, practical experiences, and management activities. The project has also surveyed the Ministry of Education and Training of 11 Southeast Asian countries and organized a series of workshops to confirm the survey results. The content of the workshops also emphasized that in the current context of Southeast Asia, attention should be paid to developing the capacity of preschool educators through the combination of training management and teaching content, pedagogical practice, and

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assessment of teaching results. Additionally, the aspect of linking competencies related to quality assurance in teacher education is mentioned in the guidelines on the management and development of preschool educators for SEAMEO member countries and the framework of competencies for preschool educators for small island developing states in the Pacific (SIDS) [14].

Bui Thi Lam argues that developing human resources is always a necessary step towards sustainable development. In Vietnam, the research and development of new preschool education programs have been raised in recent years with several major orientations to meet the demands of society and approach the preschool education programs of other countries, in which the need to be associated with quality preschool teacher training is essential. To ensure the quality of preschool teacher training, universities need to rely on training program standards; therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training pay attention to issuing standards for preschool education programs. Universities can develop and adjust their training programs based on these standards accordingly[7].

Through a review of domestic and international research on quality assurance in teacher training according to the AUN-QA approach, it has been approached from many different perspectives. However, there has been no research on quality assurance in preschool teacher training. In particular, no research has addressed comprehensive and systematic solutions to ensure the quality of preschool teacher education in terms of output standards, training programs, teaching and learning activities, assessment, and necessary conditions that need to be organized more scientifically and effectively according to specific AUN-QA standards and criteria.

3.2. Quality assurance in preschool teacher training at universities following the AUN-QA approach

Quality assurance in teacher education at pedagogical universities encompasses all activities undertaken by these institutions to maintain, improve, and enhance the quality of their training programs. Consequently, the content of quality assurance in teacher education at pedagogical universities includes the following aspects:

3.2.1. Establishing quality standards for Pedagogical Universities according to the AUN-QA approach

Quality assurance is a quality management process aimed at preventing the emergence of low-quality products. Establishing standards is the first critical function of quality assurance. Pedagogical universities, based on their mission, objectives, and conditions, develop quality standards for their institution. These quality standards represent the requirements and expectations that the institution must strive to achieve. However, when establishing quality standards, the following two trends should be avoided:

1)   Reducing the criteria and quality indicators to make it easier to achieve quality standards;

2)   Adhering strictly to the AUN-QA measurement standards without considering the institution's implementation conditions.

3.2.2. Developing a quality assurance system and processes for pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach

1)   Building a quality assurance system for pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach.

A quality assurance system encompasses all activities related to providing, ensuring, and recognizing the university's quality. These activities can be internal or external to the university.

When proposing a quality assurance system for pedagogical universities, we have referenced quality assurance systems from many countries worldwide, especially the quality assurance system of the ASEAN University Network (AUN). The reason for our particular interest in the AUN's quality assurance system is that the quality assurance model of universities in this system is highly suitable for many universities in our country in general and most pedagogical universities in particular. The quality assurance system for pedagogical universities proposed by us includes the following components:

-      The first component of the system is internal quality assurance.

This includes quality assurance activities carried out within pedagogical universities, focusing mainly on management activities, developing strategic objectives, coordinating resources, and using collected information to adjust objectives, and plans, and improve processes, thereby providing society with the best quality teachers.

- The second component of the quality assurance system is external quality assurance.

This includes quality assurance activities carried out outside pedagogical universities, focusing mainly on benchmarking, auditing, and quality assessment. If internal quality assurance is a subjective effort of pedagogical universities to shape quality, external quality assurance seeks a more objective view of the quality of pedagogical universities, providing a more convincing explanation of the quality of their quality to society. External quality assurance is an important source of information, helping pedagogical universities improve and enhance the quality of their training.

- The third component of the quality assurance system is quality accreditation

This is an external quality assessment process, accompanied by the recognition of the standards achieved by pedagogical universities based on a specific set of criteria. Quality accreditation is a recognition of quality achievement, based on the assessment of activities that have taken place, indicating that certain standards and minimum requirements have been met by these universities.

Among the three components of the quality assurance system mentioned above, internal quality assurance needs to be prioritized for development, as it is the cradle for forming quality pedagogical universities.

2)   Establishing quality assurance processes in pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach

In quality assurance, the process consists of sequential steps for managing each specific content area. Based on established quality standards, pedagogical universities need to develop quality assurance processes such as: Input quality management (learners, programs, instructors); Process quality management (the administrative structure of pedagogical universities, management activities, educational activities, and the utilization of resources); Output quality management (student development, social benefits), etc.

Quality assurance efforts in pedagogical universities can only be truly effective when quality assurance processes are well-established and implemented according to the AUN-QA approach.

3.2.3. Identifying evaluation criteria and implementing self-assessment in quality assurance of pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach

1)   Identifying evaluation criteria in quality assurance of pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach

Criteria are considered characteristics or signs used to identify, classify, or evaluate a particular object, phenomenon, or process. In quality assurance, criteria are used to evaluate the input quality, process, and output quality of pedagogical universities.

Therefore, pedagogical universities need to establish specific and clear evaluation criteria to help the institution accurately and objectively determine the results achieved for each quality factor, as well as the quality assurance processes.

2)   Implementing self-assessment in quality assurance of pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach

- **Self-assessment in quality assurance of pedagogical universities according to the AUN-QA approach**

In pedagogical universities, self-assessment is the process by which educational units examine and study their performance based on quality evaluation standards to report on the status of quality, the effectiveness of training activities, scientific research, human resources, facilities, and other related issues. This serves as a basis for units to adjust resources and processes to meet the prescribed standards. Therefore, self-assessment is considered a crucial step in the quality assurance process of pedagogical universities.

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- **Purposes, significance, and content of self-assessment in quality assurance of pedagogical universities**

Self-assessment in quality assurance at pedagogical universities aims to:

+ Clarify the status, quality, and effectiveness of training activities, scientific research, and social services following the functions and tasks of pedagogical universities;

+ Identify and compare against published accreditation standards to determine to what extent pedagogical universities have met these standards;

+ Identify the vision, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of pedagogical universities, thereby proposing strategies, plans, and measures to gradually improve the quality of training, scientific research, and social services...

Self-assessment in quality assurance at pedagogical universities has the following significance:

+ Enhance autonomy and accountability in the management of pedagogical universities- one of the requirements of the fundamental reform of Vietnam's higher education management;

+ Provide opportunities for organizations and members of the university to review and learn from their activities;

+ Increase commitment and collaboration among members, as well as between university leadership and faculty and staff.

Self-assessment in quality assurance at pedagogical universities includes the following content:

+ Collect, analyze, and synthesize information, documents, and statistical data as required by the evidence needed for the standards and criteria for university accreditation issued by the Ministry of Education and Training and specified by individual pedagogical universities;

+ Organize the inspection and survey of self-assessment opinions of staff, lecturers, and students; investigate and evaluate the employment situation of recent graduates and feedback from educational institutions - where human resources are trained or fostered by pedagogical universities;

+ Write a self-assessment report based on the accreditation standards and criteria issued by the Ministry of Education and Training and specified by individual pedagogical universities, based on the information and evidence collected;

+ Gather feedback from staff, lecturers, and students of pedagogical universities on the self-assessment report to supplement and improve.

- **The self-assessment process in quality assurance of pedagogical universities**

- Self-assessment in quality assurance at pedagogical universities is a process that includes the following steps:

- Diagnosis and design

- Organizing personnel

- Preparing for self-assessment

- Conducting self-assessment

- Analyzing and preparing the report

- Finalizing the self-assessment report

3.2.4. Fostering a quality culture in pedagogical universities

The role of quality culture in quality assurance at pedagogical universities

-      Quality culture is a key component of the internal quality assurance system in pedagogical universities.

The internal quality assurance system in pedagogical universities consists of many components, such as policy systems, mechanism systems, and quality culture. Among them, quality culture is considered a key component. When quality becomes a culture, it will transform the entire institution into an environment for maintaining and enhancing quality. Any perception or behavior that affects quality will be condemned and criticized.

-      Quality culture determines the sustainability of quality assurance activities in pedagogical universities.

Quality assurance activities in pedagogical universities can only be truly sustainable when a quality culture is established. Therefore, building a quality culture should be considered a top priority for quality assurance in pedagogical universities.

-      Quality culture creates the "identity" of pedagogical universities.

In higher education institutions, quality culture is built from the institution's mission, values, and traditions. Therefore, quality culture creates the "identity" of universities in general and pedagogical universities in particular. The quality culture of pedagogical universities originates from the Vietnamese morality of "respecting teachers and valuing education", from the position of a place that "teaches people to become teachers"... Therefore, the fundamental values that create a quality culture in pedagogical universities have unique characteristics of the pedagogical universities themselves.

-      Quality culture inspires all members of pedagogical universities to be proactive and creative in improving and enhancing the quality of their work.

The core of quality culture is that quality must be produced by all members of the organization. Everyone must care about quality and quality management in the parts of the work they are responsible for. Therefore, maintaining and improving the quality of training at pedagogical universities, requires managers, lecturers, and students to be proactive and creative in their work to achieve the best possible quality.

3.2.5. Developing a dedicated team for quality assurance in pedagogical universities

The quality assurance activities of pedagogical universities require a dedicated team to carry out this work. Their main role is to advise and support pedagogical universities on quality assurance activities. Specifically:

-      Organize the dissemination of quality standards and self-assessment results to all members within the university;

-      Provide training for key staff and members of pedagogical universities on knowledge and skills for developing the university's overall development strategy, as well as the quality strategy specifically;

-      Establish processes to ensure the quality of training in key operational areas of pedagogical universities (program development, enrollment, organizing the training process, student assessment, etc.);

-      Conduct surveys and gather feedback from members, students, and educational institutions regarding the training activities of pedagogical universities as a basis for improving and enhancing training quality.

However, to fully enhance their role, the dedicated team for quality assurance needs to be developed comprehensively: from quantity and structure to professional expertise.

3. Conclusion

Research on quality assurance in higher education and teacher training has attracted attention from both domestic and international authors, employing various approaches linked to specific socio-economic characteristics over different periods. These studies are practical and scientific, emphasizing the position and role of quality assurance in teacher training.

Several studies follow different directions, such as developing quality assurance programs according to output standards, AUN-QA standards, CDIO approach, professional standards approach, and competency-based approach. They highlight the differences in quality assurance based on these approaches and propose management

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forms and measures to achieve educational goals. These works are directly related and contribute to providing theoretical and practical foundations for the implementation and study of the topic. Researching the AUN-QA approach in quality assurance for teacher training in general, and specifically for preschool teacher training, is a method to enhance training quality. It plays a crucial role in the trend of internationalization, competition, and global cooperation in education. All of these studies represent significant theoretical and practical findings that align with modern trends and the current requirements for fundamental and comprehensive reform in education and training. Therefore, identifying the research issue "Quality assurance in preschool teacher training according to the AUN-QA approach" has highlighted new points and made direct contributions to improving the quality of preschool teacher training to meet societal needs and current international integration.

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