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## Is the National Accreditation System Sufficient? Critique of the System in the United States to Vietnam and Japan Japan Foundation Japan Studies Through Collaboration

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### Abstract

Higher education has jumped into the quality movement with expectations of enhancing the excellence of education being received by students. Higher education institutions are becoming a business while knowledge is becoming the commodity, with all aspects of education subject to global trade. There is a need for education to become more efficient, self-sufficient, and accountable. Neo-liberalism reduces governmental subsidies, while shifting costs to the market and consumers. Furthermore, it demands accountability for performance, and emphasize higher education's role in the economy. The injection of accountability and accreditation into the educational system is necessary for a quality global educational system. This paper looks at the development of national accreditation within the United States, Vietnam, and Japan. Developing an understanding of the accreditation process will contribute to the literature surrounding accreditation and quality assurance.

**Keywords:** Department of Education Organization Act; Department of Education; Accreditation Group; National Accreditation; Accreditation; Japanese Accreditation; Vietnam Accreditation.

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## **1. Introduction**

In the United States, accreditation is a form of endorsement issued by the Department of Education that validates an institution has met a minimum set of quality standards. The Department of Education itself does not accredit institutions. Instead, it provides a list of recognized national and regional agencies that are qualified to assess the quality of an institution. Nationally endorsed institutions qualify for Federal benefits, such as Federal financial aid. Regionally endorsed institutions undergo a higher set of quality standards as compared to national endorsed institutions. Institutions without accreditation does not mean that those institutions do not have a quality program. However, many employers only recognize degrees for employment if an employee has earned the degree from an accredited institution and many higher educational institutions admission standards require graduate students to have earned an undergraduate degree from an accredited institution. North and South Vietnam became reunited in 1986, and as part of that reunification, the educational system was revamped (under the Renovation policy or *Đổi Mới*). The government moved away from the Soviet Union influenced educational system of specialized schools to a market economy with open policies for international relations [1]. The renovation policy has allowed the quality of the educational system to be enhanced. The policy called for the consolidation of the Ministry of Education and Training, which controls many aspects of the higher education system, and was the primary authority responsible for the national education system. In 2002, the Ministry of Education and Training implemented a policy called “Three Things in Common”, which called for institutions to use common exam items, common organization of exams, and common use of exam results for admission [1]. The intent of the three things in common policy was to standardize admission entrance into higher education thereby providing equal access to higher education for the citizens. Today, Vietnam higher education institutions are becoming autonomous from the government. Japan has a desire to increase its educational quality and enhance its quality reputation on an international basis in order to remain competitive. The educational reform granted Japanese universities the permission to complete a self-examination and evaluation as part of its assessment review system. By 1997, more than 80 percent of universities had implemented some system of self-monitoring and evaluation [2]. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation System was passed in 2002 and came into effect in April 2004 [3]. The new quality review system required that a university’s accreditation be reviewed every seven years by a certified agency. Universities are expected to conduct a self-examination and evaluation before the review, therefore positively improving the educational quality along the way between accreditation cycles or visits. The certified approval agencies then certify whether the standards for Japanese universities have been obtained. Teaching and learning is the focus of the assessment process in Japan [2]. According to the Institute of International Education “Open Doors” 2020 annual report, during the 2019-2020 academic year, international students studying in the United States dropped 1.6% to 1,075,496 students. From the international students studying within the United States, Vietnam ranked #6 with 23,777 students and Japan ranked #8 with 17,554 students. The United States has 347,099 students studying abroad during the same time period. Japan ranked #8 (8,467 students) as the destination for the United States students. Vietnam destination did not make the top 25 list for students from the United States studying abroad [4]. Accreditation plays an important role in order to validate the quality of an educational system. United States, Vietnam and Japan are strongly committed to the educational needs of its society. All three countries have federal agencies for oversight. All three university systems seek compelling evidence of student

achievement. This paper begins with an overview of the Department of Education in the United States before moving into the national accreditation process. Personal interviews were conducted with representatives from Vietnam and Japan concerning the higher education system and accreditation within Vietnam and Japan. A comparison can be made between the United States, Vietnam and Japan. The manuscript concludes with the recommendations to consider for future research among United States, Vietnam and Japan.

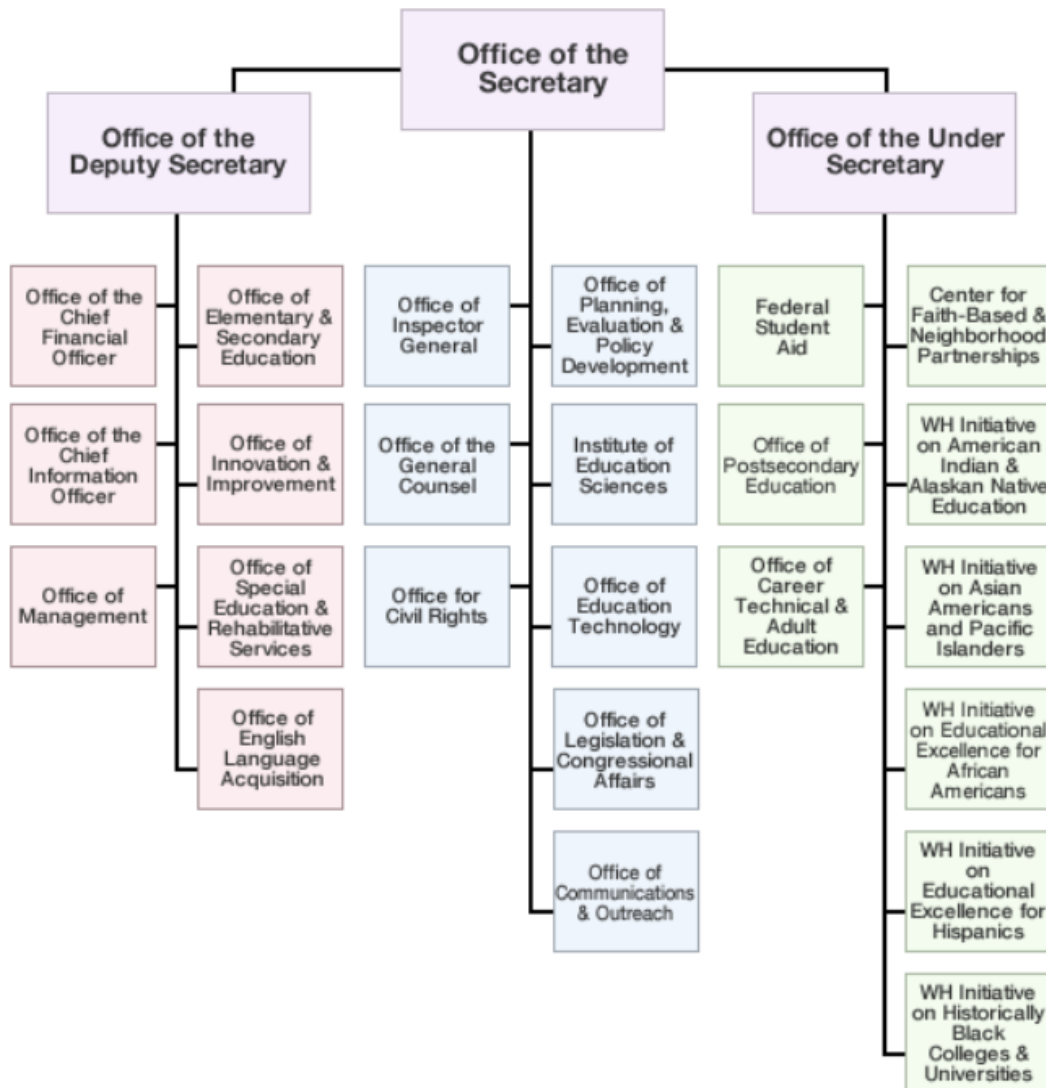
## **2. Department of education organization act**

President Andrew Johnson passed into law in 1867 the original Department of Education as a non-Cabinet agency of the United States government [5]. Back then, the Department of Education focused on establishing effective elementary and secondary school systems. The agency focused primarily on supplying educational materials and information to educators and policymakers [5]. After World War II, postsecondary education became of heightened interest of the Department of Education because of the 8 million military veterans expected to be attending college through the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (GI Bill), signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on June 22, 1944 [6]. The GI Bill provided veterans the privilege to attend college or take a refresher course without paying tuition and receive a living allowance while attending to college studies. Eventually, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was passed by President Lyndon Johnson into Federal law [7]. The Higher Education Act provided Federal funding to strengthen the postsecondary educational resources by providing grants, loans, and work study assistance to more than 12 million postsecondary students [5]. After further modifications to the Department of Education, the Department of Education Organization Act was signed into law by President Jimmy Carter on October 17, 1979 [8]. This act relocated the Department of Education from a non-Cabinet to a Cabinet agency of the United States government. The 1979 Federal law (Law 96-88) was meant to demonstrate to the United States citizens that the Federal government had a commitment to education. Law 96-88 ensured equal education access for all Americans; it provided support to stakeholders in order to carry out their responsibilities for education; it promoted improvements in the quality of education; it improved the management and efficiency of Federal education activities; it increased accountability of Federal educational programs; it encouraged the involvement from stakeholders; and it improved the coordination of Federal education programs [8]. Furthermore, Law 96-88 established an executive department (Department of Education) to be headed by the Secretary of Education. The Cabinet of the United States is a part of the executive branch of the United States government and acts as an advisory body to the President of the United States. The Cabinet includes the Vice President and 15 executive departments [5]. The Department of Education is a Cabinet level agency, and it has the third largest discretionary budget (behind that of Department of Defense and Department of Health and Human Services) [5].

## **3. Department of education**

The mission of the Department of Education is to “ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation” [5]. The Office of the Secretary for the Department of Education is responsible for “the overall direction, supervision, and coordination of all activities of the Department and is the principal advisor to the President on Federal policies, programs, and activities related to education” [5]. The Department of Education does not establish educational institutions, nor does it determine the curriculum or

educational standards for institutions. The quality assurance of institutions and degrees is maintained through private, non-governmental, organizations through a process called accreditation. As shown in figure 1, the Office of the Secretary for the Department of Education is divided into two offices, the Deputy Secretary and the Under Secretary. The figure further identifies the areas of responsibility for all three offices. It is the Office of the Under Secretary that is responsible for postsecondary education.

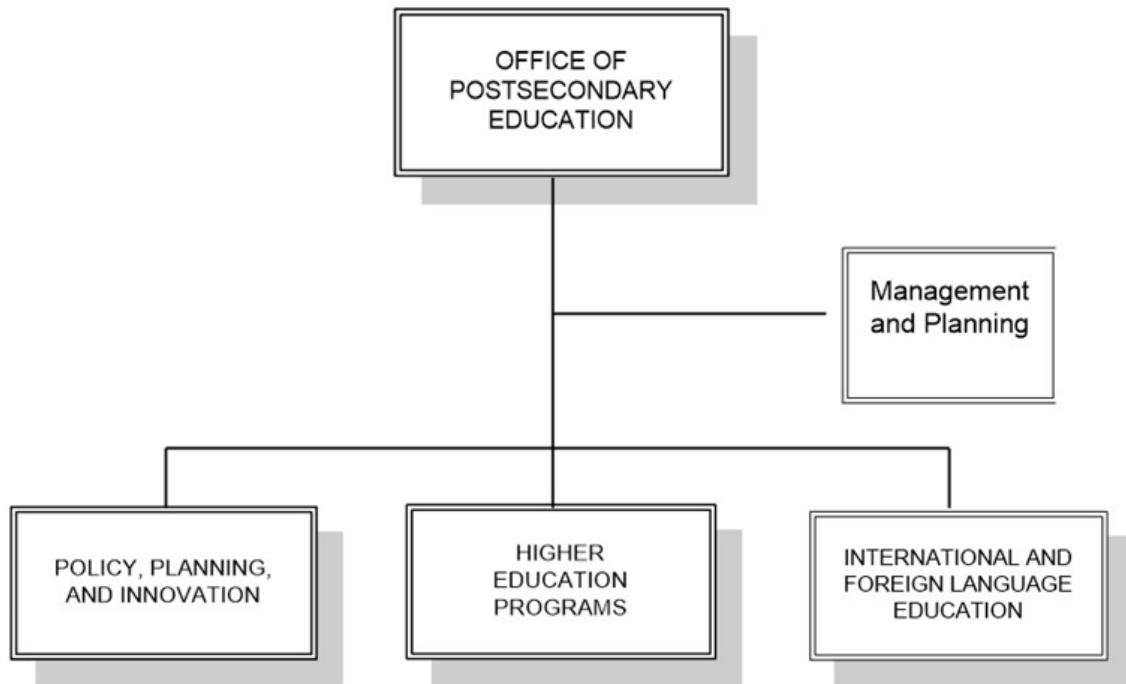


**Figure 1:** office of the secretary for the department of education

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2018)

The Office of the Deputy Secretary “focuses on the development and implementation of policies, programs, and activities relating to elementary and secondary education matters” [5]. The Deputy Secretary mission ranges from “safe and drug free schools, special education and rehabilitative services to educational of linguistically and culturally diverse students, and promotion of educational interventions, and reforms” [5]. The Office of the

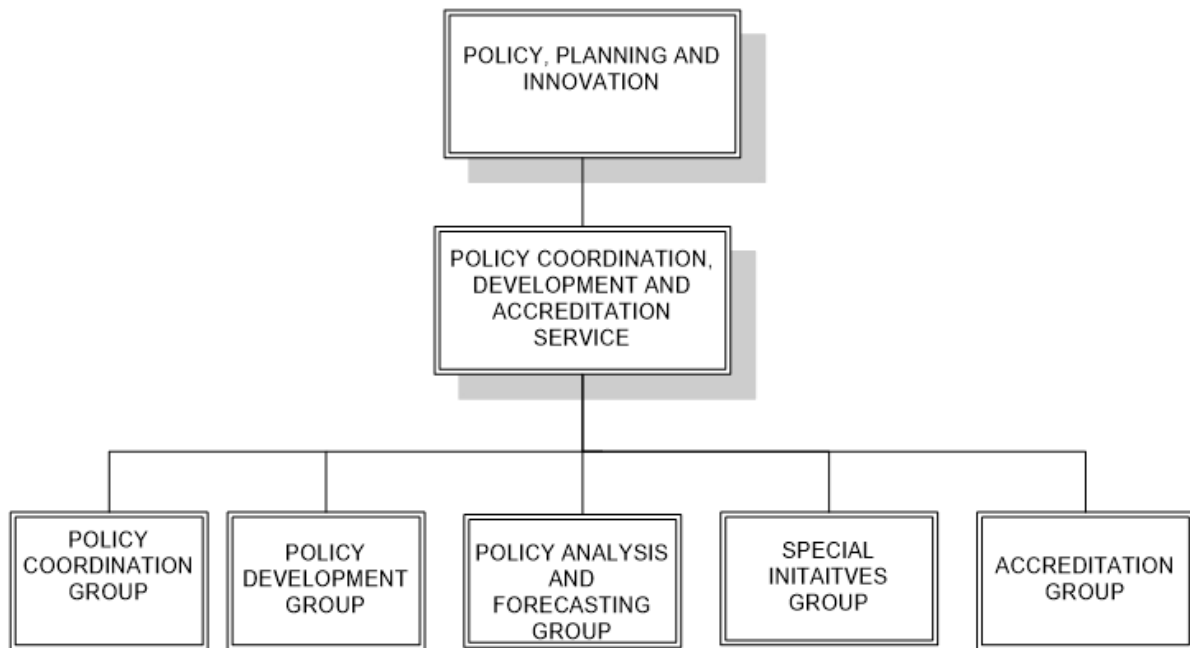
Under Secretary “focuses on higher and adult education policy, postsecondary policy, college aid, and the President’s financial reforms for the Pell Grant program” [5]. The responsibility for Federal accreditation is under the control of the Office of Postsecondary Education (under the Office of the Under Secretary). As shown below in figure 2, the Office of Postsecondary Education can further be subdivided into four accountable divisions. It is within the Policy, Planning, and Innovation division that the task for accreditation is housed.



**Figure 2:** office of postsecondary education

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2018)

As shown in figure 3, reporting directly to the Office of Policy, Planning, and Innovation is the Policy Coordination, Development, and Accreditation Service. The Policy Coordination, Development, and Accreditation Service is responsible for “a) developing policy for postsecondary education, b) conducting policy analysis and forecasting studies, and c) administering the review process of accrediting agencies that are reliable authorities as to the quality of education and training offered by postsecondary institutions and programs” [5]. The Policy Coordination, Development, and Accreditation Service can be further subdivided into five departments or groups related to postsecondary education and accreditation.



**Figure 3:** office of policy, planning and innovation

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2018)

According to United States Department of Education [5], the Policy Coordination Group is responsible for coordinating policy by managing regulation, budget, and legislative processes. The Policy Development Group reviews research and analysis on postsecondary education, develops guidance for the Federal student aid programs, and develops regulation. Policy Analysis and Forecasting Group analyze and evaluate program and population trends, develop models for forecasting costs of postsecondary education, prepares educational policy research papers, and conducts studies in response to special requests from Congress, the President, or etc. Special Initiatives Group undertakes special projects to support postsecondary education programs and policy development. Accreditation Group administers the review process of accrediting agencies and publishes a list of the nationally recognized agencies and associations that are reliable authorities as to the quality of education and training offered by postsecondary institutions and programs. The Accreditation Group also reviews the standards that foreign countries use to accredit their medical schools and of Federal agencies and institutions seeking degree granting authority.

#### **4. Accreditation group**

The Accreditation Group is one division under the ultimate responsibility of the Office of the Under Secretary and the Department of Education. The Accreditation Group administers the “review process of accrediting agencies and State approval agencies for postsecondary vocational education and nurse education seeking to obtain initial and continued recognition” from the Secretary of Education [5]. According to the United States

Department of Education [5], the primary responsibilities of the Accreditation Group include:

- Implementing statutory and regulatory criteria governing the recognition of State approval agencies and of national and regional institutional and specialized accrediting associations and agencies.
- Evaluating petitions for initial recognition, renewal recognition, and scope of recognition by accrediting bodies.
- Conducting on site reviews of accrediting agencies.
- Reviewing annual reports of recognized agencies.
- Evaluating the standards and processes used by foreign countries to accredit medical schools.
- Analyzing applications of Federal agencies and institutions seeking degree granting authority.
- Maintaining a close liaison with accrediting agencies to obtain information on institutional and program eligibility.
- Providing consultative services and general information to accrediting agencies.
- Maintaining a close relationship with the State liaison and Compliance Group about State licensing.
- Publishing the official list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies.

There are certain criteria that an accreditor must meet in order to be nationally recognized by the Department of Education. Among the criteria, an accreditor must be connected to a Federal program (such as Financial Aid). As a result, the national accreditation guidelines itself does not mean that an accreditor is of high quality. However, the national criteria used can exclude accreditors as being nationally recognized because the accreditor did not have a link to a Federal program. The Federal program connection excludes some accreditors from receiving national recognition, while the same accreditor could have regional recognition. Working as a team, the Accreditation Group and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) jointly approve or deny requests from accreditors seeking recognition. In 2008, NACIQI became an 18-member committee appointed by the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Secretary of Education [9].

## **5. Accreditor recognition process**

Accreditors seeking national recognition need to demonstrate that “its accreditation is a required element in enabling at least one of the institutions or programs it accredits to establish eligibility to participate in one or more federal programs” [5]. An accreditor must also have a minimum of two years of experience working as an accreditor who performed many duties, such as establishing standards, evaluating institutions, and making accreditation decisions. Applying to become an accreditor agency needs to be completed 6 months in advance. The Accreditation Group completes 2-3 onsite visits and it attends decision meetings as part of the accreditor recognition process. Renewal applicants complete the same review process every five years. Accreditors that wish to be recognized nationally must apply and meet certain criteria. Generally, a statement of the accreditor’s scope of recognition, evidence of the accreditor’s compliance with the criteria for recognition, and supporting documentation that the accreditor meets the requirement [5]. According to the United States Department of Education [5], the minimum documentation an accreditor can submit is:

- Accreditation standards and procedures

- Accreditor constitution and bylaws
- Guidance and training materials for on site evaluation team members
- List of complaints received by the accreditor against accredited programs or institutions
- Most recent externally audited financial statement
- Operational policies and procedures
- Published list of accredited institutions or programs
- Self-study guidelines
- Sample of completed self-studies, onsite evaluation reports, responses to onsite evaluation reports, minutes of decision meetings

NACIQI meets bi-annually (once in Fall and Spring) and approves or denies the applications. Accreditors are invited to the bi-annual meetings in order to make an oral presentation. If an accreditor disagrees with the conclusion of NACIQI, the accreditor may appeal to the Secretary of Education.

## **6. Accreditation process**

The basic level of quality assurance (national accreditation) in the United States is conducted by a recognized accreditation agency. The accreditation process is a method of “conducting non-governmental, peer evaluation of educational institutions and programs” within the United States [5]. The passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 granted accreditors the authority to review the academic quality of institutions that receive Federal funding. Accreditors review institutional or program quality, but do not have any legal control over the education institutions or programs. According to the United States Department of Education [5], some of the important functions of accreditation are to:

- Assess the quality of academic higher education programs
- Create an environment of continuous improvement and raising of standards
- Involve faculty and staff in evaluation and planning
- Establish criteria for professional certification and licensure

According to the United States Department of Education [5], the accreditation process entails six different primary activities. Those primary activities are:

- Standards – the accreditor establishes the standards in conjunction with the institution’s and/or programs.
- Self-Study – the institution and/or program provides an in-depth self-evaluation report that measures its performance against the established standards.
- On Site Evaluation – a team of peers selected by the accreditor reviews the institution and/or program against the established criteria.
- Decision and Publication – if the accreditor finds the institution and/or program meets the established criteria, accreditation or pre-accreditation is granted.
- Monitoring – the accreditor monitors each institution and/or program to ensure it continues to meet the



established standards.

- Reevaluation – the accreditor reevaluates institutions and/or programs and reaffirms to continue accreditation.

The Department of Education provides oversight over the postsecondary accreditation system by reviewing the recognized Federal accreditation agencies that are considered reliable authorities as to the quality of education provided by an institution that it accredits. The accreditation agencies hold institutions accountable based upon a set of established criteria. If the agency determines that a university is not in compliance with the established criteria, the agency can request the institution to take immediate action in order to become in compliance before a deadline. The accreditation agency must report back to the Department of Education on an annual basis. The agency must disclose, among other items, any institution or program it accredits that fails to meet the Federal financial aid Title IV standards. The main reasons that institutions lose its eligibility is because of school closure, eligibility expired because the school did not renew its eligibility, voluntary withdrawal, and failure to meet requirements for accreditation [10].

## **7. Theory**

Statist/Protectionism theory in higher education is where an institution is State controlled thereby limiting the competition. State controlled institutions are heavily regulated by the State, leaving no room for autonomy of institutions. On the flipside, globalization of higher education can be viewed as neo-liberalism, which includes the market, cost recovery, accountability, and managerialism (such as cost-cutting) [11]. Neo-liberalism is a theory that suggests that human well-being can be advanced when organizations are free from government regulation and privately held that enable free markets and free trade to exist. The government can establish an “institutional framework” that would safeguard the free markets, assist in setting up the markets (such as education), but then the government ceases its intervention at that point [12]. Higher education institutions are becoming a business while knowledge is becoming the commodity [12]. In 2008, President Obama wanted to accelerate the neo-liberalism educational system within the United States [13]. President Obama had an educational agenda to expand the education market and employ market principles across school systems. According to the Global Agreement on Trade in Services, all aspects of education are subject to global trade [13]. Universities need to increase productivity and control labor cost to enhance profitability [14]. To lower labor costs, universities might avoid hiring tenured faculty and instead hire adjunct faculty members to deliver educational knowledge. Adjunct faculty might not be as committed to the university and students, which could result in lower quality education. As a result, quality standards are important for the evaluation of institutions. According to Martinez & Garcia [32] the main facts of neo-liberalism include the following ideas:

- The Rule of the Market – Liberates organizations from all regulations imposed by the government. Allowing greater access to international trade and investment. No price controls. Overall, “total freedom of movement for capital, goods and services”. An unregulated market can increase economic growth and benefit all stakeholders.
- Cutting Public Expenditure for Social Services – such as for education.
- Deregulation -Reduce government regulation on everything that could lower profits.

- Privatization – Selling state owned businesses, goods and services to private investors. Privatization can create higher efficiency.
- Eliminating the Concept of the “Public Good” or “Community” and replace as “Individual Responsibility”. This concept would allow people to find solutions for their lack of education or etc.

Higher education scholars tend to focus on governmental policies of higher education as their dominant analytical framework [15]. Most comparative higher education research considers nation state, national markets, and national systems of higher education [15]. Scholars have noted the need for higher education to become more efficient, self-sufficient, and accountable [15]. Neo-liberalism reduces the governmental subsidies of higher education, it shifts costs to the market and consumers, it demands accountability for performance, and emphasize higher education’s role in the economy [16]. Educational standardization is necessary for neo-liberalism to become completely global in higher education, such as the implementation of global quality standards.

## **8. Methodology, analysis, results**

A qualitative case study method was used to gather data surrounding the institutional accreditation process in Vietnam and Japan. In order to understand institutional accreditation within the higher education for Vietnam and Japan, personal interviews were conducted with a faculty member, a faculty department head, a higher administration personnel, or an authoritative figure on accreditation within that country. A case study can be used in order to gather real-life background that will provide meaningful evidence as to the institutional accreditation process within higher education. Interviews were transcribed and read several times in order to compare and contrast the information shared from the interviewees. The data is documented in a research journal and supported with additional literature review in order to validate the research findings.

## **9. Vietnam**

### ***9.1 Context***

After the French’s departure from Vietnam in 1954, North Vietnam’s educational system was molded after that of the Soviet Union, a system in which universities were very specialized. The Soviet Union model had several ministries responsible for education because there was separate institutions and colleges for each discipline. The Vietnamese educational system changed in 1986 after the reunification of North and South Vietnam to a system that permitted the access of education to more students [17]. The revamped Ministry of Education was responsible for administration of institutions, guidance on policy making, and supervision over educational programs [17]. However, some institutions continued to report to other ministries as well. Today, the educational system is becoming autonomous from that of government. In 1992, Vietnam’s higher education enrollment was 162,000 students, and enrollment grew to 2.02 million in 2010 [18]. Enrollment in 2015 increased to 2.12 million students. From 1987 to 2009, the number of educator providers increased by roughly 400 percent (from 101 to 376) of which 295 were public (governmental) funded [1]. As a result of the rapid enrollment, the educational system in Vietnam underwent continual changes every year, which made it difficult

for the system to stay cohesive, and hence quality issues became a concern of stakeholders. In the 1990's, two national quality centers were developed (Vietnam National University Hanoi and Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City) [19]. In 2015, a third quality center regionally located at Danang University was established [20]. Recently, Thai Nguyen University and Vinh University joined regionally as quality centers. According to Circular 61/2012/TT-BGDĐT, these two national agencies and three regional agencies should be independent of the higher education institutions. Today, total independence for admission, curricula, etc. is almost achieved, and most of the quality assurance system is financially independent.

## **9.2 Quality measurement**

The Ministry of Education and Training developed three documents that measured quality. The three standard-based documents are: a) Procedures and cycles of accreditation of higher education institutions, b) Decision 65 on standards on accreditation of higher education institutions, and c) Guide for using evaluation criteria to measure quality of universities [18]. These documents reinforce the governments control and providing for limited autonomy for higher education, similar to the Statist/Protectionism theory. For assessment, Vietnamese institutions use three examinations (entrance exams, end of course exams, and graduation exams) as its mode of quality assessment. Learning outcomes are based upon standardized tests. Additionally, entrance exams to universities have been abolished since there are various other ways to assess the achievement of learning outcomes, not just using standardized tests. In 2004, the Ministry of Education and Training initiated a new form of quality assurance. The new system is based upon institutional self-assessments and internal quality assurance, which would be evaluated by an external accreditation agency. Today, there are five national and regional external quality centers in Vietnam (Danang University, Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam National University Hanoi, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, and Vinh University).

## **9.3 Education acts**

The Education Act of 2005 provided for consolidation of and development of the Ministry of Education and Training. The purpose of the Ministry of Education and Training was to develop admission quotas based upon the labor force requirements, which meant students were assigned to a field of study (and job position) when entering an institution [17]. The Education Act of 2005 also delegated the Ministry of Education and Training with specifying the curriculum frameworks for each discipline, and monitoring and assuring the quality of all education providers [1]. The Education Act 2012, permits universities to design its curriculum for all levels of education [21]. Competition within the higher education system is not driven based upon the quality of the program. Instead, competition is based upon the number of seats available within the institutions. There are more students wanting to enter into higher education institutions, but there are considerable fewer seats available. As the number of HEIs increase, more seats will become available, thus lessening the competition. Due to the limited seats available in institutions, stakeholders do not make the institutions accountable for a quality learning experience [18]. If a student is accepted for admission, the student will attend that university, irrespective of the quality of the program [18]. Today, universities are becoming autonomous from government, and are developing their own curriculum, their own entrance exams, and student quotas. This represents a major move towards independence and neo-liberalism. The previous program contained the same

curriculum, which is to say that all programs have the same quality and learning outcomes. According to Tran, Nguyen & Nguyen [1] the imposed governmental framework provides for:

- Educational objectives with regard to ethics, content knowledge and practical skills
- Program structure
- Compulsory courses including details of course topics

Today, HEIs are receiving more autonomy. Current law is designed to reform and regulate HE. The law:

- Removes the government cap on tuition fees
- Allows HEIs to issue degrees to their graduates
- Allows HEIs to manage their academic affairs within the curriculum set by MOET
- Allows HEIs to choose the education quality accreditation agency from a list of accreditation agencies approved by the MOET

However, in November 2016, Vietnam implemented a National Qualification Framework [22]. The revised framework aligns with the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework. The ASEAN framework is expected to ease the transferability of qualifications on a region-wide basis for ASEAN members. Furthermore, the ASEAN framework strengthens the quality of academic programs by providing learning outcomes and benchmarks. Currently, Vietnam has a four-year bachelor's degree which resembles the United States. Students can be enrolled full or part time, with a 2.0 GPA (or 5.0 GPA over 10) and 120 to 180 credit hours (varies by programs) needed for graduation. The National Qualifications Framework suggests that Vietnam plans to reduce its bachelor's degree to three-years [22].

#### **9.4 Accreditation**

In 2003, the Examination and Education Quality Accreditation Department was established under the control of the Ministry of Education and Training [1]. Institutions were assessed on two levels, with level one being the minimum standard. The government signed into law ten quality standards with 61 criteria [1]. According to the guidelines, an institution will receive accreditation if it meets 80 percent of the evaluated criteria [1]. Additionally, the National Council for Accreditation endorses an institutions certificate for accreditation on the basis of institutional self-assessment and audit report [1]. According to Tran, Nguyen & Nguyen [1], the ten quality standards are:

- Mission and objectives of the institutions (2 criteria)
- Organization and management (7 criteria)
- Educational program (6 criteria)
- Educational activities (7 criteria)
- Managerial staff, teaching staff, and administrative staff (8 criteria)
- Learners (9 criteria)
- Research, application, development, and technology transferability (7 criteria)

- International cooperation (3 criteria)
- Library, learning equipment, and other facilities (9 criteria)
- Finance and financial management (3 criteria)

The ten quality standards (61 criteria) by Ministry of Education and Training is no longer applied in Vietnam. Instead, a new set of standards have been developed by the Ministry of Education and Training that contains 25 quality standards (111 criteria). According to Circular 12/2017/BGDĐT, the 25 quality standards are:

- Vision, mission, and culture (5 criteria)
- Administration (4 criteria)
- Leadership and management (4 criteria)
- Strategic management (4 criteria)
- Policies on education, scientific research, and community service (4 criteria)
- Human resource management (7 criteria)
- Financial and material facilities management (5 criteria)
- Networks and external relations (4 criteria)
- Internal quality assurance system (6 criteria)
- Internal assessment and external assessment (4 criteria)
- Internal quality assurance information system (4 criteria)
- Quality improvement (5 criteria)
- Enrollment and admission (5 criteria)
- Design and review of curriculum (5 criteria)
- Teaching and learning (5 criteria)
- Learner assessment (4 criteria)
- Learner service and support activities (4 criteria)
- Scientific research management (4 criteria)
- Intellectual property management (4 criteria)
- Scientific research cooperation and partnership (4 criteria)
- Community service and connection (4 criteria)
- Training result (4 criteria)
- Scientific research result (6 criteria)
- Community service result (4 criteria)
- Financial and market result (2 criteria)

### **9.5 Summary**

Vietnam is vamping up its educational system to prepare students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The government has scaled back its authority over higher education and allowing more autonomy within these institutions. The curriculum is being modified to meet the demand of employers. Vietnam has established a new accreditation and quality assurance mechanism and is heading towards a national qualification framework that is aligned with

ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework on a region-wide basis for ASEAN members. The ASEAN Qualification Reference Framework has six main objectives. Those objectives are: a) to promote learner and worker mobility, b) to improve quality of education and training, c) to enhance validation of non-formal and formal learning, d) to promote life-long learning, e) to create equitable opportunities for gainful employment, and f) promote a meaningful life experience [23]. Currently, under the guidance of Ministry of Education and Training, Vietnam's accreditation is conducted by five external accreditation centers. The five accreditation centers are close to be completely independent and financial supportive. Accreditation is granted every five-years and is mandatory for all higher education institutions. The modernization of its education system is positive and represents a major move towards independence and neo-liberalism.

## **10. Japan**

### ***10.1 Context***

After World War II, higher education in Japan exploded to meet the demands of the growing economy. The higher education system which was designed for the elite citizens became a massification of higher education. Student enrollment numbers in higher education flourished. Japanese universities were known as being "difficult to enter and easy to graduate from" [24]. Students graduating from high school prepare for a rigid examination to gain admittance into a prestigious higher education university. The time spent during college years was considered leisure time for the student and graduation from a university was a certain outcome without exerting any effort as a student. According to Yamaguchi & Tsukahara [24], employers were more concerned that a potential employee could pass the rigorous admittance exam into a prestigious university instead of the content a student learned while in college. Since World War II, Japan experienced a massification of universities in the higher education industry. Universities found a need to accept students regardless of entrance test scores to fill the vacant seats within institutions of higher learning. Since the 1990's, the Japanese educational system and the quality assurance system was reformed.

### ***10.2 Postsecondary education***

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Economic Survey [27], approximately 75 percent of high school graduates enroll into tertiary education. A tertiary education system is any type of education beyond the high school diploma, which can also be termed postsecondary education. A tertiary educational system includes diplomas, undergraduate and graduate certificates, bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees [25]. Figure 4 shows the diversity of Japan's postsecondary educational institutions in 2008. As can be seen, private institutions dominate the market for postsecondary education. Overall, private institutions accounted for 89.6 percent of all postsecondary education, with technical colleges (85.9 percent) dominated by the national government. Japanese private universities are a move towards the theory of neo-liberalism.

As shown in figure 5, in 2007 Japan had slightly over 3.6 million students enrolled in postsecondary education. Universities accounted for 68.6 percent of the enrolled population, with 77.4 percent of enrolled students

attending private universities. It can also be seen that women dominate the enrollment into junior colleges, while being underrepresented at universities and graduate schools. According to the Ministry of Education, 70 percent of students that complete high school will enter some form of post high school education [24]. Enrollment numbers would equate to 3,600,000 students being enrolled with 2,800,000 students in universities, 138,000 students in junior colleges, 58,000 students in college of technology, and 660,000 students in professional training institutions [26].

Category	Universities	Junior colleges	Specialised training colleges <sup>1</sup>	Technical colleges <sup>2</sup>	Total
National <sup>3</sup>	86	2	11	55	154
Public <sup>4</sup>	90	29	206	6	331
Private	589	386	3 184	3	4 162
Total	765	417	3 401	64	4 647
Percentage private	77.0	92.6	93.6	4.7	89.6

1. The specialised curriculum in these institutions is included in tertiary education.
2. These five-year colleges enrol students from age 15. Only students in the final two years are included in the tertiary sector.
3. Funded directly by the national government.
4. Funded at the local and regional government level.

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

**Figure 4:** postsecondary education

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

Thousands of students in 2007<sup>1</sup>

Category	Graduate schools	Universities	Junior colleges	Specialised training colleges	Technical colleges	Total
National	153.9	454.7	0.1	0.7	53.2	662.4
(Per cent)	(58.5)	(18.0)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(89.4)	(18.0)
Public	14.7	114.1	10.6	27.6	4.2	171.1
(Per cent)	(5.6)	(4.5)	(6.1)	(4.2)	(7.1)	(4.7)
Private	94.2	1 951.8	162.1	629.2	2.1	2 839.4
(Per cent)	(35.9)	(77.4)	(93.8)	(95.7)	(3.5)	(77.3)
Total	262.7	2 520.6	172.7	657.5	59.5	3 673.0
(Per cent)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)
<i>Memorandum item:</i>						
Share of women (%)	30.7	41.2	88.9	54.4	15.6	44.9

1. Percentage of students attending national, public, and private institutions is shown in parentheses.

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, *Basic Survey on Schools, 2007*.

**Figure 5:** students enrolled in postsecondary education

Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

University enrollment has been rising in Japan and over 200 junior colleges have converted its colleges into a university [27]. This yields fewer students (and women) in junior colleges, and higher enrollment (and more women) in universities. As university enrollment increased, so did the number of institutions, which lowered the number of students attending a specific institution. As a result, prestigious universities in Japan were forced to lower its admission standards in order to maintain enrollment [27]. For instance, Osaka University lowered its bar and began to admit students that once were unable to attend the prestigious school [28]. Japanese universities do not rank high worldwide, for instance, in 2010-11, only five Japanese universities ranked in the top 200 in the World University Rankings (which represents a 50 percent decline since 2005) [27]. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) promotes policies that will improve the economic and social well-being on a worldwide basis, and is currently made up of 35 countries. OECD countries have a 70 percent average graduation rate, while Japan has a 93 percent graduation rate, which implies that Japan universities must lack rigor in order to ensure its students graduate [27]. As a result of junior colleges converting into universities, Japanese universities are competing heavily for enrollment. Improving educational outcomes is a concern of Japan. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Japan's economy reached maturity, experiencing an aging population and low birth rate. During this period of low birth rate, the number of universities continued to rise, and this created an excess of supply of higher education and colleges were unable to fill its enrollment quotas [24]. Most postsecondary schools in Japan are private, private schools rely heavily on tuition revenue and receive very little financing from the government, as indicated by the theory of neo-liberalism. National universities in Japan receive large stipends of governmental support (from the National Schools Special Account), even though national schools enroll the fewest number of students. Governmental spending on education is said to be "the lowest among advanced nations" [29]. As a result, the financial burden is heavy on the students and families in Japan. Japanese parents began to question the quality of education being received to the financial costs of attending a university.

### ***10.3 Quality assurance***

To improve Japan's quality, the government implemented the Global 30 project which is intended to increase international foreign domestic enrollment and encourage domestic students to travel overseas for education. The goal is to increase foreign student enrollment to 300,000 by 2020 [27]. The Japanese government also launched Campus Asia, which provides guidelines for credit transfers and grading policies between Japan, China and Korea [27]. Japan universities have a goal to teach approximately 30 percent of its courses in English, which should permit attracting better students, thus improving educational quality [27]. The number of children between the ages of 5-19 is expected to decrease by 35 percent by 2030 [27]. Fewer school age children translates into fewer postsecondary students, making competition fierce among Japanese universities for enrollment. Since 2005, the Japanese government has permitted private universities to go bankrupt, which resulted in consolidation of schools and a need for student transferability of credits [27]. The quality assurance system in Japan can be divided into three time periods. The first period began during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (pre-war to post-war). In 1903, the Japanese government enacted the Specialized School Order which categorized the types of institutions and in 1918 the government enacted the University Order which created universities [24]. Universities with high reputations were known as elite universities, which consisted primarily of imperial universities, and were supported by the government. After World War II, the School Education Law was



enacted in 1947 which created the 6-3-3-4 school system [24]. It was after World War II, that the elite universities lost their formal elite status. The quality assurance system relied on two main bodies: 1) the Standards for the Establishment of Universities and 2) the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA). The 1956 Standards for the Establishment of Universities regulated the curriculum, the student-staff ratio, and the required space per student [24]. The 1947 non-governmental JUAA was tasked with controlling the quality at universities on a volunteer basis [24]. The quality assessment was voluntary, and institutions tended not to focus efforts on controlling quality. It was not until the 1980s that quality would be assessed in higher education. The second round of quality assessment began during the 1990s when self-monitoring and self-evaluation systems were introduced in Japan. The deregulation permitted the institutions flexibility within the curriculum. The revised regulation would be required to self-assess and self-monitor its educational system. By 1997, 83.7 percent of universities had conducted a self-assessment of its educational activities [24]. The final period began during the 2000s when national universities were converted into autonomous universities from government and third-party quality evaluation system was introduced. Universities were required to formulate proposals, and performance would be evaluated by the government to receive funding. The government established the National University Corporation Evaluation Committee (NUC-EC) to assess a university performance in education, management, and research against the university's annual and mid-term plans. The National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) was designed to evaluate the mid-term objectives for education and research.

#### **10.4 Assessment**

The Ministry of Education created the Certified Evaluation and Accreditation (CEA) system in order to strengthen evaluation and improve accountability of universities [24]. This development would require institutions to undergo a comprehensive evaluation of education, facilities, organizational operations, and research by a third-party agency [24]. This would become the new national evaluation system in Japan. As of 2020, there are 13 certified evaluation and accreditation organizations in Japan. One organization, National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education (NIAD-QE), establishes different standards for universities based upon the education administered by an institution. NIAD-QE developed 10 general standards for evaluation of universities. The National Association for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) undertakes the institutional evaluation and accreditation of universities. According to NIAD-UE [30], those 10 general standards are:

- Mission of the University (2 viewpoints)
- Teaching and Research Structure (6 viewpoints)
- Academic Staff and Teaching Supporting Staff (7 viewpoints)
- Student Admissions (5 viewpoints)
- Academic Programs (undergraduate & graduate) (26 viewpoints)
- Learning Outcomes (4 viewpoints)
- Facilities and Student Supports (10 viewpoints)
- Internal Quality Assurance System of Teaching and Learning (5 viewpoints)

- Finance and Management (13 viewpoints)
- Public Information on Teaching and Learning (3 viewpoints)

Each of the general standard has viewpoints (or criteria). The 81 viewpoints are used when making the determination of whether or not an institution has met the quality standard [30]. An institution meeting all 10 general standards is awarded accreditation. The results of the accreditation process are made public by NIAD-QE. The higher education environment has changed in Japan due to globalization, declining birth rates, and changes in industry. As a result, quality assurance in higher education has become very important in Japan. As shown in figure 6, NIAD-QE was established in 2016 after a merger between NIAD-UE and CUFM [31]. NIAD-QE supports the enhanced quality movement in higher education in Japan.

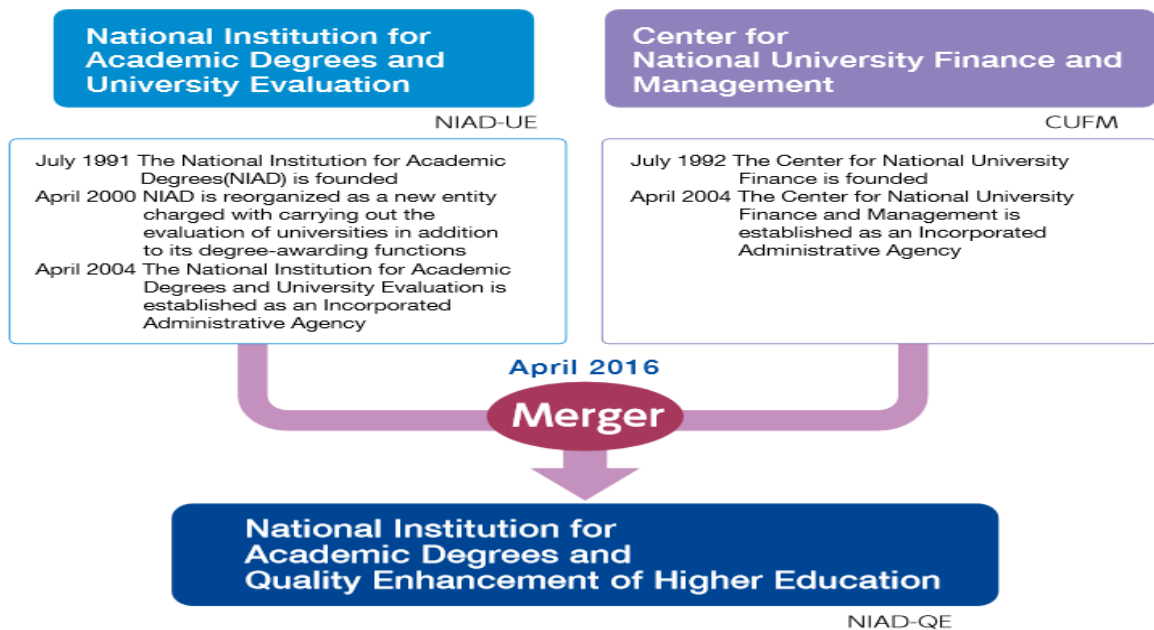


Figure 6: NIAD-QE

Source: NIAD-QE (2019)

## 11. Conclusion

The erosion of confidence in higher learning institutions by parents, legislators, and trustees started to surface in the 1980s and subsequently led to expanding transparency demands. The construct of quality pervades all facets of higher learning including institutions, locally, regionally, and internationally [26]. Laser focused governmental bodies and accrediting agencies are symbolic key players. A focus is placed on providing quality education for all based on current needs in the world. The knowledge, skills and dispositions students learn must reflect and respond to the needs and expectations of individuals, countries, global population and the requirements of the contemporary workplace. This paper concentrated on obtaining an understanding of the development of national accreditation and quality assurance systems in the United States, Vietnam and Japan. It became apparent that all three countries realize the importance of quality and are heavily involved in the

assessment process. Higher education currently in Vietnam is where Japan was after World War II. Higher education currently in Japan is where the United States was after World War II. There are some differences between the countries in who controls the assessment process. However, the final quality outcomes are universally shared among the three countries as each country fosters the theory of neo-liberalism. Some potential research areas for investigating would include looking more deeply into the accreditation process for the United States, Vietnam and Japan. Additionally, exploring the quality assurance regulations for establishing a university or program (such as traditional live verses distance learning) would be of interest to further our understanding such a complex task. There are many emerging themes that could be brought into research as well. Themes such as 21<sup>st</sup> century skill set needed, lifelong learning, transparency and accountability, and development of international quality assurance standards. Further research studies could have a significant influence on the development of quality assurance.

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