

Building A Culture of Quality in Multiethnic and Multicultural Contexts: A Case Study of Tay Nguyen University, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the roles and challenges involved in fostering a quality culture at higher education institutions located in ethnic minority regions, with Tay Nguyen University serving as a representative case. As an institution situated in a multicultural, multilingual, and unevenly developed context, Tay Nguyen University exemplifies both the potential and complexity of embedding quality culture in such environments. Drawing on theoretical frameworks in educational quality governance and empirical survey data, the study proposes a model of quality culture tailored to the region's specific socio-cultural characteristics. The findings aim to inform both policy and practice, contributing to the promotion of sustainable and equitable development in Vietnam's higher education sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of global reforms in higher education, quality assurance and continuous enhancement have become central concerns for universities worldwide. International frameworks such as the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and UNESCO's Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications (2019) highlight that beyond structural mechanisms, a deeply embedded *quality culture* marked by shared values, attitudes, and practices is essential for sustainable institutional excellence. As universities adapt to the demands of a knowledge-based and digital society, developing an inclusive and resilient quality culture emerges as a strategic imperative.

This challenge is especially pronounced in ethnically diverse and resource-constrained regions. Institutions serving large populations of ethnic minority students face linguistic heterogeneity, diverse educational backgrounds, and infrastructure gaps. These conditions not only influence student outcomes but also shape institutional norms, governance, and the engagement levels of both staff and students in quality assurance. In such settings, merely complying with quality standards is insufficient; what is needed are culturally responsive and participatory approaches to build and sustain an equitable quality culture.

Tay Nguyen University (TNU), located in Vietnam's Central Highlands, exemplifies this context. As a regional public institution with a high proportion of ethnic minority learners, TNU has undertaken internal quality assurance (IQA) measures, formal accreditation, and stakeholder consultation initiatives. Yet embedding a meaningful, lasting quality culture remains a persistent challenge given cultural diversity, institutional constraints, and resource limitations. This study explores the enabling factors and obstacles involved in fostering a quality culture at TNU, with a special emphasis on multicultural dynamics.

The research draws on theories of organizational learning, inclusive quality assurance, and cultural responsiveness in higher education to investigate how quality culture is perceived, negotiated, and sustained. By examining institutional policies, staff and student perceptions, and sociocultural factors, the study contributes to broader debates on promoting equity-centered, contextually grounded approaches to quality in higher education particularly in settings often marginalized in global discourses on academic excellence.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Concept and Characteristics of Quality Culture

The concept of Quality Culture has gained increasing attention as higher education institutions (HEIs) seek sustainable models of internal quality assurance beyond compliance. According to the European University Association (EUA), quality culture is "a set of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality that lives in the behaviors and practices of institutional actors" (EUA, 2006, p. 10). It encompasses not only formal structures but also the informal norms and cultural elements that shape quality-related decisions and attitudes.

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Harvey and Stensaker (2008) emphasize that quality culture is both an outcome and a process: it emerges from continuous dialogue, mutual trust, and participation between institutional actors. They argue that “quality culture is not a static property of institutions but a dynamic phenomenon that reflects organizational learning” (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008, p. 430). In their view, quality cultures are built on shared meanings that evolve over time through interaction, rather than being engineered by external pressures.

They also distinguish between a bureaucratic approach to quality—“characterized by control, compliance, and accountability mechanisms”—and a developmental approach that emphasizes “improvement, engagement, and collegial learning” (Harvey & Stensaker, 2008, p. 436). This distinction is crucial in shaping long-term commitment rather than short-term compliance.

Similarly, Sursock (2011) argues that quality culture flourishes when both ownership and collaboration are embedded across all institutional levels. She notes that “a genuine quality culture is one where staff and students feel involved and empowered in shaping the quality agenda” (Sursock, 2011, p. 14). Leadership plays a key role not only in setting the tone but also in fostering open spaces for dialogue and experimentation.

A strong quality culture, therefore, is not imposed from the top down but co-constructed through inclusive and reflective practices that align with institutional missions, values, and socio-cultural contexts. As Stensaker (2015) points out, “the cultural dimension of quality requires attention to how values are negotiated and practiced, rather than merely prescribed” (p. 42). This view reinforces the importance of bottom-up engagement in embedding quality as a lived and evolving reality within higher education institutions.

2.2. Quality Culture and Sustainable Development in Higher Education

The link between quality culture and sustainable development is increasingly emphasized in recent global education discourse. UNESCO (2022) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) both affirm that equity, quality, and inclusion are inseparable dimensions of educational sustainability. As noted by UNESCO (2022), “achieving quality education is not only about access, but also about equity, relevance, and values that promote sustainability across generations” (p. 15). In this light, quality culture is more than a technical concern—it is a strategic and ethical imperative for institutions to ensure access, equity, relevance, and long-term impact.

A quality culture that supports sustainability integrates dimensions such as lifelong learning, ethical governance, social justice, environmental consciousness, and community engagement. According to Disterheft, Caeiro, Azeiteiro, and Filho (2021), “embedding sustainability in higher education institutions requires a cultural transformation that involves all stakeholders and transcends disciplinary boundaries” (p. 5). Such a culture not only strengthens internal coherence but also aligns institutional missions with the broader global agenda. It also fosters a climate of innovation and reflexivity that enables HEIs to adapt to changing societal demands while staying rooted in their local responsibilities. As the authors emphasize, “sustainability-oriented quality culture encourages experimentation, reflective practice, and long-term thinking within higher education governance and pedagogy” (Disterheft et al., 2021, p. 6).

2.3. Quality Culture in Multicultural and Marginalized Contexts

Recent research has underscored the importance of developing culturally responsive quality cultures in multi-ethnic, multilingual, and socioeconomically diverse regions. The OECD (2021) highlights that educational quality in such settings must attend to “systemic inequalities in opportunity, representation, and belonging” (p. 18). Quality assurance mechanisms should recognize the diversity of learners’ experiences, knowledge systems, and cultural identities.

Lee and Lee (2021) argue that in multicultural contexts, quality culture must go beyond universal benchmarks to embrace culturally embedded values and inclusive pedagogical practices. “Quality culture in diverse societies must be grounded in the lived realities of learners and educators, not imposed from abstract global standards” (Lee & Lee, 2021, p. 77). They advocate for participatory quality models that engage marginalized voices and respect plural knowledge traditions—particularly in institutions serving indigenous or ethnic minority populations.

For regional universities such as Tay Nguyen University, which operate in ethnically diverse and historically underserved contexts, these insights are critical. Located in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, the university serves students from over 40 ethnic groups, including large populations of Ê Đê, M’ông, and Gia Rai. In recent years, Tay Nguyen University has initiated inclusive quality assurance practices such as bilingual academic counseling, minority student feedback forums, and community-engaged curriculum design—efforts aligned with what Lee and Lee (2021) describe as “co-constructed quality practices that recognize epistemic diversity” (p. 79).

This approach resonates with international best practices. For example, the University of British Columbia (Canada) incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing in its curriculum and evaluation frameworks (Battiste, 2013), while the University of Otago (New Zealand) operationalizes Māori values in its internal quality assurance (Hall et al., 2020). Such examples underscore the need for regionally grounded yet globally connected models of quality culture in higher education.

3. 3. Research Context and Methodology

3.1. Research context

Tay Nguyen University (TNU) is a public higher education institution located in Buon Ma Thuot, the socio-economic and educational center of Vietnam's Central Highlands. Strategically positioned in an ethnically diverse and under-resourced region, TNU plays a pivotal role in addressing educational inequities by providing access to quality higher education for students from mountainous, remote, and border areas—particularly ethnic minority communities such as the Ê Đê, M'ông, Gia Rai, Mạ, and Ba Na.

A hallmark of TNU's institutional identity is its multicultural and multilingual campus environment. According to internal planning reports, students from ethnic minority backgrounds account for approximately 25–30% of the total student population, representing nearly all provinces in the Central Highlands and South Central Coast (TNU, 2016). This demographic diversity creates a dynamic educational space where indigenous cultural values and local knowledge systems intersect with modern academic practices.

In 2024, the Vietnamese Prime Minister approved Decision No. 671/QĐ-TTg, affirming the strategic vision to develop Tay Nguyen University into a regional center of high-quality training by 2030, with a longer-term goal of becoming a top-tier university in Southeast Asia by 2045. The Decision specifies that the university will focus on core academic areas closely aligned with regional development needs, including health sciences, agriculture and forestry, biotechnology, and teacher education. This policy orientation not only confirms the university's vital role in human capital development for the Central Highlands but also elevates its mission toward national and international academic excellence.

The university's strategic goals include expanding undergraduate enrollment to over 11,000 students by 2030, with more than 30% from ethnic minority backgrounds, and achieving national accreditation for all undergraduate programs and international accreditation for at least 20% of its offerings. These targets highlight the institution's dual commitment to equity and excellence, aiming to balance quality assurance with social responsibility.

Given this context, the study of quality culture at Tay Nguyen University must be grounded in both institutional aspirations and cultural realities. The challenge lies not merely in applying generic quality assurance frameworks, but in cultivating a culturally responsive quality culture that reflects local identities, empowers marginalized voices, and ensures sustainable educational transformation in one of Vietnam's most diverse and strategically significant regions.

3.2. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with the quantitative survey serving as the primary method. The sample consisted of 350 participants, categorized into three target groups:

Group 1: 85 faculty members from specialized departments those directly involved in teaching and contributing to the development of academic culture.

Group 2: 230 students the central stakeholders in the educational process, reflecting both their engagement with and benefit from a quality academic environment.

Group 3: 35 academic leaders and managers at the unit/departmental level key decision-makers responsible for formulating and implementing quality assurance policies.

The purpose of this design was to explore the perceptions, levels of participation, and practical engagement of stakeholders in building a quality culture at a university located in a region characterized by rich ethnic and cultural diversity.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection tool was a structured questionnaire designed to assess:

Awareness of the concept, role, and attributes of quality culture in higher education.

Quality assurance practices, including self-assessment activities, curriculum improvement initiatives, student feedback mechanisms, and involvement in quality planning processes.

The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale and was adapted to the local context, incorporating dimensions that reflect multiculturalism and the diversity of educational experiences among ethnic minority students.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using two main approaches:

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis: These methods were applied to identify general trends, levels of awareness, and practical engagement across stakeholder groups, as well as to examine correlations between individual factors (e.g., ethnicity, professional role, work experience) and attitudes or behaviors related to quality culture.

Thematic analysis: Applied to open-ended responses and field notes, this qualitative method helped uncover meaningful patterns and themes that shape the understanding and enactment of quality culture in a multicultural context, particularly from the perspectives of ethnic minority participants.

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Through this research design, the authors aim to elucidate the characteristics, opportunities, and challenges in cultivating a quality culture at a regional university serving ethnolinguistic minority populations, thereby proposing feasible and context-sensitive solutions for local implementation.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Awareness of Quality Culture at Tay Nguyen University

In the context of higher education reform aiming toward international standards, building and fostering a quality culture has become an essential requirement for universities in Vietnam. Quality culture encompasses not only a system of values, beliefs, and behaviors related to quality but also serves as a driving force for continuous improvement and sustainable institutional development. A sound and profound understanding of quality culture forms the foundation for effectively implementing quality assurance and enhancement initiatives across all levels of university governance.

At Tay Nguyen University a higher education institution playing a pivotal role in training human resources for the Central Highlands region the assessment of quality culture awareness among different stakeholder groups is crucial for strategic planning toward sustainable development.

Understanding the Concept and Role of Quality Culture

Survey results from three main stakeholder groups university administrators, faculty members, and students revealed significant disparities in their understanding of the concept and the perceived importance of quality culture. The average scores on a 5-point Likert scale are presented in the table below:

Stakeholder Group	Average Understanding of the Concept (/5)	Average Perception of Its Role (/5)
Administrators	4.6	4.8
Faculty	4.2	4.5
Students	3.5	3.9

The data indicate that university administrators possess the highest level of awareness, both in terms of defining quality culture and recognizing its strategic role in institutional development. Faculty members also demonstrate a relatively strong understanding, reflecting their engagement with academic quality assurance and professional governance processes.

However, it is noteworthy that students especially those from ethnic minority backgrounds, who account for a substantial portion of the student body at Tay Nguyen University exhibit only moderate levels of understanding. Within the student cohort, disparities are evident between ethnic Kinh students and Ede students. Specifically, Ede students reported an average understanding score of just 3.2, compared to 3.7 among Kinh students.

The Influence of Ethnicity, Language, and Culture on Awareness

The influence of demographic factors such as ethnicity, language, and cultural background is further reflected in the following survey findings:

Demographic Group	Average Understanding of Quality Culture (/5)
Ethnic Minority Students	3.2
Kinh Students	3.7
Ethnic Minority Faculty	3.8
Kinh Faculty	4.3

These differences in awareness are not only observed across functional roles (administration, teaching, learning) but are also markedly apparent between ethnic groups. Both ethnic Kinh students and faculty members display higher levels of understanding compared to their ethnic minority counterparts. This discrepancy partly reflects existing inequalities in access to academic information and institutional communication.

A critical contributing factor is the barrier posed by academic language—particularly for ethnic minority students whose mother tongues differ from Vietnamese. Moreover, current internal communications at the university predominantly use standard Vietnamese in a formal, academic style, which can be difficult to comprehend, especially for first- and second-year ethnic minority students.

The lack of bilingual materials or simplified explanatory resources has inadvertently created a cognitive gap among different stakeholder groups in the same educational environment. This issue calls for urgent attention in institutional communication and internal training policies, with a view to enhancing cultural inclusiveness and linguistic accessibility.

In summary, awareness of quality culture at Tay Nguyen University is stratified by role, institutional position, and ethno-linguistic background. While administrators and faculty generally demonstrate a relatively high level of understanding, students particularly those from ethnic minority groups still face notable challenges. These findings highlight the necessity for the university to develop a targeted strategy for enhancing quality culture awareness. This strategy should include revising communication content

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and methods, designing culturally responsive training programs, and acknowledging the diverse cultural and linguistic realities of learners in the Central Highlands region.

4.2. Practical Implementation and Practices of Quality Culture at Tay Nguyen University

In the process of building a quality culture within higher education institutions, the implementation of quality assurance activities reflects not only the internal institutional commitment but also the extent to which key stakeholders including administrators, faculty, and especially students are genuinely engaged. In multicultural institutions such as Tay Nguyen University, where a significant proportion of students come from ethnic minority backgrounds, equitable and inclusive access to these activities serves as a critical indicator of the quality culture's maturity.

In recent years, Tay Nguyen University has undertaken various quality assurance initiatives aimed at fostering continuous improvement and the sustainable development of academic programs. The following data illustrate the level of awareness and engagement among stakeholders across three representative activities:

Quality Assurance Activity	% of Administrators Aware	% of Faculty Participating	% of Students Accessing
Internal Program Review	100%	85%	35%
Student Feedback Collection	92%	78%	44%
Curriculum Improvement Workshops	88%	65%	28%

These figures suggest that quality assurance activities have been extensively and deeply implemented at the administrative and faculty levels. Faculty engagement in internal reviews and curriculum enhancement workshops ranges from 65% to 85%, indicating relatively high awareness and commitment among academic staff.

However, the rate of student engagement in these processes remains limited. Only 35% of students reported being exposed to internal program reviews, and just 28% participated in curriculum improvement workshops. This gap is particularly pronounced among ethnic minority students who form a substantial segment of the student population at Tay Nguyen University raising concerns about unequal access and participation in shaping institutional quality culture.

Participation of Ethnic Minority Students in Quality Assurance Activities

Activity	% Participation (Kinh Students)	% Participation (Ethnic Minority Students)
Course Quality Evaluation	58%	32%
Program Improvement Feedback	36%	18%
Class Discussions and Contributions	61%	34%

The considerable discrepancies in participation between Kinh and ethnic minority students across all surveyed activities reflect a persisting inequality in access to and engagement with the processes of building a quality culture. These disparities are not merely statistical they represent structural and cultural barriers within the learning environment: lack of safe spaces for student voice, concerns about language challenges or being judged, and a general skepticism regarding whether their input is genuinely valued and acted upon.

For ethnic minority students, sociocultural factors such as hesitation in expressing opinions, discomfort in competitive academic settings, and limited exposure to critical dialogue practices during secondary education may further hinder their capacity to actively participate in academic forums and quality enhancement processes.

From the practical implementation of quality assurance activities at Tay Nguyen University, it is evident that a foundational quality culture has taken root among administrators and faculty. However, in order to embed quality culture as a cohesive element of the university's academic life, there is a pressing need for targeted strategies to strengthen student agency and create empowering spaces particularly for ethnic minority students so that they may become active co-creators of educational quality.

4.3. Barriers to Developing Quality Culture in Multicultural Environments

In the context of Vietnam's increasingly diverse higher education landscape—especially in institutions located in regions such as the Central Highlands, where ethnic minority student populations are substantial developing a quality culture cannot be separated from multicultural considerations. However, in practice, differences in language, communication styles, value systems, and behavioral norms across cultural groups have posed significant challenges to the equitable dissemination and institutionalization of quality culture. This section analyzes the key barriers impeding the uniform and sustainable development of quality culture in multicultural educational settings.

First, language differences and limitations in academic communication

One of the most critical barriers stems from language discrepancies between faculty members and ethnic minority students. Survey data revealed that 65% of ethnic minority students (EMS) reported difficulty understanding quality-related feedback when presented in academic Vietnamese a language often perceived as abstract, formal, and removed from the everyday linguistic practices of ethnic groups.

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Conversely, 40% of faculty members indicated challenges in clearly conveying quality assurance requirements to EMS. This issue goes beyond mere linguistic obstacles and reflects deeper divergences in epistemological backgrounds, information processing styles, and communicative norms between cultural groups. In academic environments where language serves as the primary medium for constructing knowledge and critique, such linguistic barriers significantly diminish the effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms.

Second, cultural distance between instructors and learners

A more systemic barrier involves the cultural gap between instructors and learners. Approximately 48% of EMS surveyed reported feeling “alienated” in a learning environment shaped predominantly by the mainstream cultural norms of the Kinh majority. The absence of cultural empathy in teaching practices makes it difficult for students to relate to course content and assessment methods.

Traditional cultural norms such as modesty, avoidance of public disagreement, and deep respect for elders within ethnic minority communities often discourage students from asking questions or engaging in classroom debates. This, in turn, inhibits the development of critical thinking skills, which are fundamental to modern university quality culture.

Third, fear of giving feedback and lack of safe dialogic spaces

Discrepancies in feedback behavior across student groups, as well as between faculty and administrators, also represent significant barriers. The table below summarizes key survey findings:

Respondent Group	% Unwilling to Give Feedback	Main Self-Reported Reason
Ethnic Minority Students	62%	Fear of judgment; unfamiliarity with open critique
Kinh Students	38%	Skepticism about real impact of feedback
Junior Faculty	43%	Fear of repercussions when giving feedback to superiors

These figures point to a lack of safe and equitable dialogic spaces in the institutional environment. For EMS, barriers are not only linguistic but also sociocultural: fears of misinterpretation, stigma, or being undervalued. For Kinh students despite their language advantage doubt over the responsiveness of feedback systems reduces their willingness to engage. Meanwhile, younger faculty experience psychological pressure when offering upward feedback, particularly in the absence of institutional encouragement for constructive dissent.

From these analyses, three key insights emerge:

First, while a foundational quality culture has been established at the managerial and faculty levels at Tay Nguyen University, it has yet to effectively reach students especially EMS, who make up a significant portion of the student body.

Second, multiculturalism has not yet been systematically or explicitly integrated into quality assurance activities. This has resulted in communication gaps, disparities in feedback behaviors, and limited EMS participation in curriculum development and improvement processes.

Third, fostering a quality culture in multicultural environments requires a long-term, inclusive strategy. This includes intercultural training programs for both faculty and students; the creation of anonymous, transparent feedback channels; the provision of bilingual resources and feedback mechanisms; and, most critically, the establishment of a safe, open, and respectful educational climate that embraces diversity.

5. DISCUSSION

In the process of building and developing a quality culture in regional universities—particularly in highly multicultural areas such as the Central Highlands—it is essential to draw upon international models as both theoretical frameworks and practical references. According to Trowler (2020), the development of quality culture in higher education should be grounded in a continuous interaction among stakeholders, with a focus on cultivating trust, collective responsibility, and learner participation in quality enhancement processes. Similarly, the OECD (2023) emphasizes that for regional universities, especially those embedded within ethnic minority communities, the implementation of quality culture must prioritize flexible approaches, learner-centeredness, and the integration of indigenous perspectives into curriculum design.

However, when these models are compared with the realities at Tay Nguyen University -where students come from over 30 different ethnic groups it becomes evident that while the “co-creation of quality culture” framework holds substantial theoretical value, its practical implementation faces significant challenges. The linguistic diversity, learning customs, value systems, and expectations of ethnic minority students often do not fully align with conventional quality standards shaped by mainstream governance models. This disparity necessitates that quality culture development take place within a space of genuine dialogue one that is inclusive of diversity and responsive to the lived experiences of both learners and educators (Nguyen & Le, 2022).

Therefore, it is imperative to restructure university governance towards a model of liberal governance which entails expanding democratic space in academic life and empowering students, faculty, and local communities to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes related to educational quality. At the same time, transformational leadership plays a pivotal role in

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driving cultural change, articulating a shared vision, and fostering long-term commitment to sustainable quality development. In addition, inclusive educational policies are needed such as targeted language support for ethnic minority students, intercultural competence training for faculty, and the development of assessment tools adapted to multicultural contexts to ensure equitable and effective participation of all learner groups in quality assurance systems (UNESCO, 2021; Pham, 2023).

Debates on the applicability of co-creation models in multiethnic university contexts should not remain merely theoretical but must be further examined through empirical research, critical reflection from multiple perspectives, and adaptive localization based on specific institutional and cultural conditions.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Tay Nguyen University represents a distinctive model of region-specific higher education in Vietnam, characterized by a high proportion of ethnic minority students and a multiethnic campus environment. Within this context, the development of a quality culture should not be grounded solely in technical procedures; rather, it must be situated within the culturally and linguistically diverse realities of learners. The following recommendations aim to reposition quality culture as a co-creative journey a collaborative endeavor involving administrators, faculty, students, and the broader community.

6.1. Policy Recommendations: Developing a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Quality Assessment Framework

As Vietnamese higher education increasingly aligns with international standards for quality assurance and evaluation, a particular challenge for ethnically diverse regions lies in ensuring that such frameworks do not suppress or marginalize the cultural identities, languages, and specific needs of minority students. Current national quality assessment frameworks largely rely on universal indicators and standardized metrics, yet they often fail to reflect the nuanced realities of students' cultural backgrounds, linguistic capacities, sense of belonging, and actual participation in academic life.

It is, therefore, essential to design a quality assessment framework that incorporates culturally relevant criteria such as the preservation of cultural identity, local language proficiency, and ethnic minority students' perceived inclusion within the multicultural academic environment. From a theoretical standpoint, the OECD (2023) emphasizes that in multiethnic educational settings, effective quality assurance must prioritize cultural sensitivity and local contextualization. This means moving beyond outcome-based metrics to include indicators that reflect how learners especially those from minority backgrounds experience inclusion, empowerment, and self-development within the academic environment. Similarly, UNESCO (2022) calls on member states to implement education assessment mechanisms that respect cultural diversity and promote social equity in higher education.

Practically, some Vietnamese universities have already pioneered such inclusive approaches. For example, Dalat University and Hue University have begun to integrate intercultural competence and minority student support criteria into faculty and administrative performance evaluations. According to an internal survey published in 2022, 83% of ethnic minority students at Dalat University reported feeling "respected in terms of cultural and linguistic identity" due to regular inclusion of ethnic-related content in training and evaluation activities (Dalat University, 2022). Similarly, Hue University has developed student assessment tools that measure "perceived inclusion" and "individual development grounded in ethnic cultural heritage," contributing to improved graduation rates among minority groups.

Given that Tay Nguyen University enrolls more than 30% ethnic minority students, it is well-positioned to learn from these models and develop a more adaptive and inclusive quality assessment system. Incorporating indicators that measure students' perceptions of the campus climate, the possibility of using their native language in select academic settings, and the presence of cultural identity-affirming teaching practices would significantly enhance educational quality in meaningful ways. Moreover, this approach aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) on inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all regardless of ethnicity or language.

Internationally, the model of culturally responsive assessment frameworks implemented in New Zealand offers a valuable reference. At the University of Waikato, evaluation criteria for Māori students consider not only academic performance but also their involvement in community activities and the development of ethnic identity within the university environment (Macfarlane et al., 2017). This model illustrates that integrating cultural dimensions into quality assessment not only preserves scientific rigor but also enhances the social validity and accessibility of the higher education system.

In conclusion, constructing a culturally and linguistically responsive quality assessment framework is not merely a policy recommendation it is an urgent practical necessity for ethnically diverse institutions such as Tay Nguyen University. This strategy is crucial to promoting educational equity, fostering positive learning experiences and motivations among minority students, and ensuring inclusive, sustainable, and contextually appropriate development in the region's higher education landscape.

6.2. Practical Dimensions: Cultivating a Quality Culture through Community-Based Practices

For a quality culture in higher education to move beyond slogans and policies and become organically embedded within academic and training activities, it must be grounded in community-based practices that is, through actions, lived experiences, and the active engagement of all stakeholders within the academic ecosystem. In multiethnic institutions such as Tay Nguyen University,

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enacting a quality culture requires a co-creative mechanism that respects cultural differences and elevates the roles of both instructors and learners in the quality improvement process.

a) Integrating Indigenous Culture into Curriculum Design

One of the most impactful practical approaches is to incorporate local cultural elements into the formal curriculum. This integration not only affirms the cultural identities of ethnic minority students but also enhances intercultural competence among all learners in the context of globalization. Trowler (2020) asserts: “Quality is not a fixed entity but the result of the interaction between policy, practice, and the cultural context of each institution” (p. 12). Accordingly, curricula must reflect local values as part of an institution's commitment to quality.

At Tay Nguyen University, some departments have piloted the integration of ethnographic content into specialized courses and invited ethnic minority artisans to deliver guest lectures, allowing students to access indigenous knowledge in practical and respectful ways. However, these initiatives remain fragmented and have yet to be institutionalized at the university-wide policy level.

Nationally, institutions such as Hue University and Dalat University have pioneered the development of courses such as “Cultures of Central Highlands Minorities” and “Folklore Arts of the Central Highlands,” using Community-Based Learning (CBL) approaches to enhance interaction, hands-on experience, and cultural awareness (Tra et al., 2022). Such curricular integration helps foster a learning environment that is both holistic and cohesive, reflecting a commitment to quality based on equity and cultural recognition.

b) Enabling Active Participation of Multiethnic Students in Quality Assurance Processes

Establishing a quality culture also demands mechanisms for meaningful student participation, particularly for ethnic minority students who are often excluded from feedback and program improvement processes due to language barriers, psychological hesitation, or power imbalances.

In countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and Canada, internal quality forums have been established to empower students to engage in dialogue with administrators and faculty. In these forums, students act not only as feedback providers but also as co-designers of learning quality. According to the OECD (2023): “Multidimensional forums co-chaired by students and faculty form the foundation for a comprehensive and intercultural quality culture” (p. 55).

In Vietnam, several universities in Ho Chi Minh City have piloted student councils involved in program quality assurance. Although not yet inclusive of ethnic minority students, these efforts have shifted perceptions from “passive evaluation” to “active critical engagement.” At Tay Nguyen University, some departments have organized ethnic peer advising groups such as Ede and M'Nong students supporting their peers in learning but there is currently no formal mechanism allowing these groups to participate in program evaluation, despite their clear potential.

c) Enhancing Faculty Capacity in Multicultural Teaching and Student Feedback

A major barrier to building a quality culture from practice lies in the limited intercultural competence of faculty who play a central role in delivering curricula, creating inclusive classrooms, and responding to student needs. Cameron and Freeman (1991) emphasize that organizations with “clan” or “adhocracy” leadership models, which promote open communication and collaboration, tend to develop stronger and more sustainable quality cultures than those reliant on rigid control structures.

Research by Flumerfelt and Banachowski (2011) also highlights that constructive and multidimensional feedback is a key quality indicator in institutions with ethnically diverse student populations. Trowler (2020) notes: “Faculty are not merely transmitters of knowledge; they are architects of the cultural climate within the classroom” (p. 38).

At Tay Nguyen University, younger faculty members often lack confidence in providing feedback to ethnic minority students partly due to communication barriers and partly due to limited training in intercultural pedagogy. Some instructors reported feeling “concerned about being misunderstood” when offering direct comments to minority students, which leads to a tendency to avoid feedback altogether (In-depth Interview, 2024).

By contrast, at Simon Fraser University (Canada), instructors are required to undergo periodic intercultural training before teaching in regions with significant Indigenous populations. Training includes modules such as “culturally sensitive feedback,” “navigating value conflicts,” and “equity in academic assessment.” Vietnam could adopt this model to strengthen faculty capacity.

Ultimately, cultivating a quality culture through community-based practices must transcend policy discourse and become embodied in curricular content, participatory mechanisms, and faculty professional competencies. In multicultural environments such as Tay Nguyen University, this is not only an ethical imperative in academic practice but also a strategic necessity for enhancing equity, fostering inclusion, and ensuring sustainable educational quality.

7. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing body of research on quality culture in higher education by examining the specific context of Tay Nguyen University, a regional institution located in a culturally diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged area

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of Vietnam. The findings highlight that quality culture is not merely a technical framework of procedures and standards, but rather a deeply embedded set of shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape how institutions define, implement, and sustain quality.

By integrating empirical insights from the university's internal practices with comparative analyses of international models, the study underscores the central role of culturally responsive governance, inclusive evaluation frameworks, and community-engaged quality assurance. In doing so, it reaffirms that quality culture is pivotal to enhancing institutional resilience, promoting student engagement particularly among ethnic minority populations and achieving long-term educational equity.

Furthermore, this research positions quality culture as a strategic lever for transforming universities in under-resourced regions into inclusive, adaptive, and mission-driven institutions. It advocates for policy mechanisms that recognize the importance of local cultural capital, indigenous knowledge systems, and multilingual realities in shaping effective higher education quality assurance.

Future research should deepen the investigation of multicultural university governance, particularly by exploring how leadership styles, participatory management, and intercultural communication strategies influence the formation and sustainability of quality cultures in multi-ethnic and multilingual educational settings.

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