

# Evaluating The Effectiveness Of Trade Union University's International Cooperation Activities From 2014-2023 And Lessons Learned

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## **Abstract**

*International cooperation is considered one of the important pillars, the inevitable trend of each university in order to improve the quality of its training and scientific research in the context of globalization. During the last 10 years (2014-2023), with a determination to achieve common development goal, all the officials, employees and students of the Trade Union University have been continuously renovating, inovating, especially strengtheing international cooperation activities and have achieved many significant achievements, contributing effectively to the construction and development progress of the University in particular and the country in general. The article focuses on the analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of Trade Union University's international cooperation activities from 2014-2023, in order to indicate the problems and thei causes in promoting cooperative relations such as: the policy mechanism on intenational cooperation activities; the recgnition of higher education institutions; the financial resources, facilities and human resources.*

**Key words:** *International cooperation, higher education institution, Trade Union University.*

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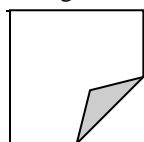
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## **I. Evaluating The Effectiveness Of Trade Union University's International Cooperation Activities From 2014-2023.**

From 2014-2023, the international cooperation activities of the Trade Union University have been actively implementing in many fields, gaining significant achievements, contributing significantly to the performance of high-quality training and research tasks, affirming and enhancing the University's position.

First, our university expands cooperation with many partners from all over the world, including universities, academies, international organizations. The number of partners grow not only rapid, but also diverse in cooperation variety and methods. In addition to traditional partners in the former socialist bloc, the scope of our university's relations has been extended to many other countries such as Germany, Philippines, Australia, South Korea... The expansion of relations with other countries around the world, on one hand, increases the reputation of our university, and on the other hand, enhances the opportunities for cooperation, facilitates students and faculty to expose and cultivate knowledge in an international environment. The number of partners with Trade Union University in the 10-year period from 2014 to 2023 is 16 units, and 9 units are the number of official partners that our university has singed cooperation agreements with, including: Russian Academy of Labour and Social Relations; International University of Belarus; Chinese University of Labor Relations; Polytechnic University of the Philippines; Institute of International Education DCG (Germany); Anhalt University of Applied Sciences (Germany); Mokwon University (South Korea); Melbourne Institute of Technology (Australia). The most developed phase is 2023 with 09 partners, of which 05 have signed MOU/MOA.

Secondly, international cooperation is one of the essential elements to enhance the professional capacity of the Trade Union University, both in training and research, contributing to the training of a large force of highly qualified human resources for the School in particular as well as for the Trade Union of Vietnam in general. Through collaborative programmes of training, research, academic exchange, many lecturers and officers of the university have the opportunity to cultivate, train their expertise, scientific research, management skills, especially to improve their foreign language skills and cultural understanding. The statistics show that the growth rate of the number of staff, faculty sent abroad to participate in the activities of international cooperation from 2014 to 2023 is going down, especially in the period of the Covid-19 epidemic. Though after the pandemic, international cooperation activities has been back on track, however, the consequences of COVID-19 outbreak and the Russia-Ukraine armed conflict as well as political tensions between the major countries, and climate change have put a significantly impact on the international cooperation activit  of TUU, so the numbers of



officers, lecturers sent overseas during this period are not much. The year 2019 marked a huge growth grew with eight delegations and 16 officers sent abroad. (Trade Union University, 2022b; Trade Union University, 2022a)

At the same time, the processes of collaborative research, proposal and construction of projects, completion of training programmes are also a process of reality contacts, accumulating experience, effective working methods, ways of thinking and orientation of education development, advanced science and technology so as not to fall behind with the world. These are really valuable experiences that only when you participate directly in the international cooperation process, TUU has the opportunity to learn and absorb.

Thirdly, international cooperation activities allow students to access and learn in a dynamic, open environment, with numerous scholarships and training programs based on modern foreign curricula.

In addition to the acquisition of up-to-date knowledge, advanced thinking and learning methods, international training programmes also focus on improving students' language skills. Teaching in English to students of high-quality classes in Business Administration motivates them to study well not only in their major subjects but also to cultivate confidence in communication, exchange of expertise, especially when participating in international conferences and seminars.

Beside of that, the registration of foreign students to study or internship at TUU under student exchange programmes has demonstrated the international integration and prestige of these programmes. It also promotes student exchange activities, creating cross cohesion between Vietnamese and international students. Through this, students of international training programmes are not only well equipped in terms of knowledge, foreign languages, but also the thinking methodology, development orientation and mentality to be ready to integrate. These are all favorable conditions for them to continue studying abroad and integrate well in a dynamic but also competitive and challenging international work environment. (Trade Union University, 2022d) Foreign affairs activity has exploited and attracted scholarships from universities, associations, and foreign institutions for good and poor students, including academic and artifacts scholarships. Not only that, it also creates a link between TUU and the employers, thus training students according to the needs of the labour market and facilitating their job search with their main major. Thus, along with the lecturers, students are benefit the most from the international cooperation activities.

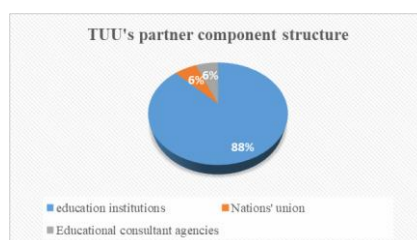
Fourthly, international cooperation activities, whether directly or indirectly, have contributed to facilities construction and upgrade, equipment and machinery modernization, supplementation and updating of teaching curricula and materials, have step by step met TUU's teaching and learning modern standard. In fact, international cooperation has not yet invested directly in the facilities of TUU so far. However, the implementation and expansion of international cooperation has contributed significantly to the school's budget, partly strengthening the financial resources to invest in the facilities.

### **Drawbacks**

The achievements and contributions that the international cooperation activities bring to TUU are not small. However, it cannot be denied that these activities still remain many weaknesses, shortcomings, and has not yet reached maximum effectiveness and exploited all its advantages, are not equal to the cooperation potential and the needs of the school. These weaknesses are reflected in some of the School's international relations constraints.

In terms of partnership, with a typical higher education institution under the organization of the Trade Union of Vietnam, the partners of the Trade Union University is mostly universities and research institutes (87.5%), then to the union of countries (6.25%), the educational consultant agencies (6.25%). Through the results of the statistics of the number of foreign partners in cooperation with the Trade Union University, it can be seen there are two cooperation units groups, the group which has 6.3% include units have only one cooperation, the group has the rate of 12.5% are those with two cooperation. Partners in countries with traditional cooperation, such as Laos, Russia, Belarus, have not developed more partners in the last 10 years, only China has developed one more unit in 2023, however, this unit has only cooperative relations, has not yet signed the MOU/MOA agreement. (Trade Union University, 2022b; Trade Union University, 2023b)

Partner component structure chart



Source: Institution of International Cooperation & Training 2024

From 2022 until the end of 2023, after the Covid-19 pandemic, the school began to develop and expand its international partnership to other regions, such as Europe, with Germany, Great Britain, Italy; Asia, with Korea, the Philippines; and Australia.

However, if only based on statistics, it often does not reflect properly the nature of the relationship as well as the effectiveness of cooperation because there are situations where many units have cooperated but have not signed MOU/MOA agreements or units have only signed but not implemented (about 30%).

In terms of form, the international cooperation activities of the school are implemented in the form of bilateral and multilateral. In the early stages, most of them were degelation exchanges to work, study, research... The supports are usually on curricula, constructing training programm, sending The support focuses largely on curricula, creating training programs, sending staff members abroad, teaching, researching... in nations which have conventional relationships such as Laos, Russia, and China.

In terms of cooperation, the school aims to expand cooperation in all fields, from training, scientific research to faculty and student exchange... Since Vietnam opened its doors in the field of training education, the Trade Union University has been actively engaged in foreign affairss, strengthening international cooperation in order to develop both quantity and quality of cooperation activities.

However, according to statistics from the Institute of International Cooperation and Training, only about 70% of the singed agreements are implemented, mainly through cross-border education with Laos. International scholarships rarely have students enrolled because of high requirements for foreign language proficiency remain a hard door for students. Although foreign language courses have been strengthened, many students are still unable to attend English courses or do not qualify to continue their studies abroad after completing their studies in Vietnam.

In scientific research area, although some cooperation activities have been carried out but are isolated, small in number, timely and undeveloped into long-term projects, mainly only stops at inviting experts from participating countries to share in international conferences, scientific seminars organized by the school. For the last 10 years, the school hasn't had any topics, projects, or programmes of international cooperation, nor any research involving foreign experts. (Trade Union University, 2023a)

In term of student exchanges, the activities that have not been carried out regularly, continuously and only take place in one direction, that is, only foreign students come to Vietnam to exchange and study, no Vietnamese students participate in exchange programs abroad (since 2015 there has been no additional tour of students to go abroad exchange). Moreover, when compared to many universities in the country, it has not really grown and attracted large numbers of students, including Vietnamese and foreign students.

Cross-border education activity plays an important role in the development of higher education institutions in Vietnam, enabling Vietnamese universities to access advanced training and management technology, enhancing research and training capacity, thus expanding opportunities to international, high-quality education services for Vietnamese learners at reasonable cost. In recent years, international association programmes have flourished, opening the door for students to access international standard education programmes right at home, this is a breakthrough strategy for Vietnam's higher education, a common trend of the world and the universities in Vietnam heading towards. However, at the Trade Union University, by the end of 2023, there is no such form of associate training. The school needs to take measures and proposals to request the superior authorities to facilitate, allow the school to carry out the cross-border education and scientific research with foreign partners in accordance with the provisions of the Amended Law, supplementing some articles of the Law on Higher Education of November 19, 2018 and Decree No. 86/2018/ND-CP of June 6, 2018 of the Government regulating foreign cooperation and investment in the field of education in order to further promote the activities of the HQT in the future.

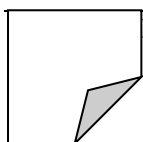
If compared the international cooperation activities with similar universities in Vietnam, the international cooperation activities at the Trade Union University are still at a modest level.

Thus, in addition to the benefits and achievements achieved, the international cooperation activities at the Trade Union University has many limitations. These limitations not only reduce the effectiveness of the activities, the quality of training, teaching, researching, but also limit the extension of the relations scope, and the raise of the school's prestige.

### ***Cause of restriction***

#### *International cooperation policy mechanism*

In addition to legal regulations on relevant foreign affairss, the Trade Union University, a public career unit of Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, is directly administered under Decision No. 1587/QD-TLD dated 11/11/2020 of Vietnam General Confederation of Labor on the enactment of the Trade Union of Vietnam's unified governing Regulations on foreign affairs activities. However, this Regulation has a lot of unrealistic content, in particular the processes and procedures related to foreign affairs activities require time,



multiple levels of permission, rigid regulations... This is one of the reasons that restricts the school's foreign affairs activities, namely:

- When the annual Foreign Affairs Plan has been approved by Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, but when it comes to the implementation of each actual activity, once again the school has to seek the opinion of the General Condeferation and have to wait for the approval before the operation is carried out. This affects the progress as well as the overall state of the activities.
- For activities arising outside the annual Foreign Affairs Plan approved by Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, the school must prepare a plan, relevant contents and a request report for the undertakings of the Permanent Presidium through Central Committee's Commission for External Relations at least 90 days prior to implementation. This would be a waste of opportunities to work with our school's partners.

#### *Trademark of higher education institution*

International cooperation activities are considered to be a focused method to enhance the capacity, trademark and the position of education institution in the region and the world, building a dynamic, professional and highly internationalized learning and working environment, contributing to the creation of global citizens. On the contrary, the trademark and the position of education institution also have a huge influence on the school's joint activities, including external activities.

In the context of increasing global competitive challenges, it requires education institutions to adopt a different strategy to maintain success in the global ranking race. These challenges require a different strategy in the education institutions. It's worth noting that higher education is now widely considered a market that many researchers as well as organizations spend interest in. Besides, there has been a relatively fierce competition among education institutions for student enrolment. To maintain the success and expansion of the university, it requires developing and maintaining a unique trademark identity through overall trademark strategy improvement.

The Trade Union University is a multidisciplinary, multi-sectoral university under Vietnam General Confederation of Labor directly subordinate and under the management of the Ministry of Education and Training. Although over more than 78 years of construction and development, the University has continuously strived to earn significant achievements, yet the trademark and reputation of the Trade Union University on the Vietnamese educational map today remains rather modest.

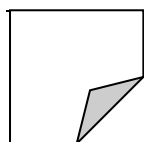
In particular, the Trade Unions University is in the list of middle group schools, alongside the majors with high entry points such as: Law, Accounting, Business Administration, Financial Banking, some majors entry points of the University from 2019 to 2023 are in the range of 14 - 15 points (Work Relations, Sociology, Labour Protection) (Trade Union University, 2021; Trade Union University, 2022e; Trade Union University, 2023d).

January 2023 Webometrics ranking: Union University ranked 41st/58th in Hanoi and 139/184th in Vietnam (Webometrics, 2023). With the entry quality of some majors (including traditional ones) still very low (equivalent to ground scores); the Webometrics rankings are still quite far from the Top 100 most educated universities in Vietnam, it can be seen that the trademark and reputation of the Trade Union University on the Vietnamese educational map is still quite modest today. This has little effect on the results of the school's international cooperation activities operations.

#### *Financial resources, facilities.*

Financial resources are a key element in the development of the School in general (along with human and mechanical issues) and in developing international cooperation activities in particular. The financial mechanism need to be transparent, clear and regulated in the school's internal spending rules, to look together for different financial resources and effective spending methods that serve the goals. Currently, the financial resources for the international cooperation activities of the school are still very limited, so the school's initiative in expanding relations with foreign partners is meeting difficult. Therefore, the School needs to develop specific financial mechanism for international cooperation activities, increase flexibility and proactivity in order to achieve high efficiency.

In terms of facilities, it's an equally important issue. The international cooperation can be seen as the diplomatic face of the school, and therefore the facilities spent for the international cooperation also need to meet some proportional standards to create an proper image and position for the School when working with international partners. Thus, the development of facilities for international cooperation is seen as a key investment aimed at building trust among partners in the relevant issues. During the years, when the school is shifting to the mechanism of financial autonomy, we also spent interests and investments for the facilities, however, the budget provided by the State for the University's construction and purchase is limited, not qualified to meet the requirements to perform many tasks, so the status of property, facilities of the university



today is many inaccessible, not synchronous, the size of the assets are limited, has not met the teaching requirements of faculty and students at the time of the education comprehensive reform.

#### *Human resources*

In any education insstitute, the training and nuturing of human resources is always the top priority. In the international cooperation, that mission is even more important because effective cooperation requires similarity in terms of the level of knowledge, awareness, the way how the officers, lecturers, experts is doing this work among partners. Fact shows that activities with the more highly qualified officials working with experts and foreign partners, the more we have the proactive, equal rights, efficient use of operational funds and better quality of implementation. At present, however, the University's foreign affairs officers are not fully equipped with expertise and foreign languages, so they have not effectively exploited the information about partners and other sources of support from foreign organizations, have not performed the tasks that require coordination with the domestic authorities properly, and have not fully utilized the opportunities offered by international relations.

## **II. Lessons Learned From The Practice Of International Cooperation At The Trade Union University**

### **Achievement:**

First, the school has expanded its partnership with many international partners from many parts of the world, whileining its traditional partnership. The number of partners of the university not only grows rapidly, but also varies in the partnership form and cooperation methods.

Secondly, international cooperation is one of the essential elements to enhance the professional capacity of the Trade Union University, both in training and research, contributing to the training of a large force of high quality human resources for the school in particular as well as for the Union of Vietnam in general.

Thirdly, students, like teachers, gain the most from international cooperation. International cooperation activities provide students with a likelihood to obtain education in a lively, open environment, with numerous scholarships and training initiatives based on modern foreign syllabi.

Fourthly, the exploitation of international cooperation activities, whether directly or indirectly, has contributed to the construction, upgrading of facilities, modernization of equipment, machinery, supplementation and updating of curricula, documents, step by step satisfy the modern way of teaching and learning for the school.

### **Drawbacks:**

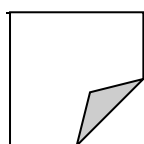
First, in terms of partnership, as a typical higher education institution under the Trade Union of Vietnam's administration, the partner of the university is mostly universities and research institutes, then to the Union of nations, the Education Consulting Agencies. Partners in countries with traditional cooperative relations such as Laos, Russia, Belarus have not developed more partners in the last 10 years, only China has developed one more units by 2023, but this unit has only cooperative ties, has not yet signed the MOU/MOA agreement. There is still a situation where many units have cooperative relations but do not signed any MOU/MOA agreements or have signed but have not implemented.

Secondly, in terms of form, the school's international cooperation activities are implemented in bilateral and multilateral form. In the early stages, most of them were team exchanges to work, study, scientific research... Curriculum, training programming, sending faculty globally, teaching, and research are typical fields that require support in nations having traditional connections, such as Laos, Russia, and China.

Thirdly, in terms of cooperation fields A number of signed agreements have been implemented, mainly cross-border education with Laos. International scholarships rarely have students enrolled because of the high requirements for foreign language proficiency and the school's students have not been able to meet them. In the scientific research sector, mainly only stopped at inviting experts from participating countries to share in international scientific conferences organized by the school. For the last 10 years, the school has not had any international collaboration on any subject, project, or program, nor any research involving foreign experts. In terms of student exchanges, the activities that have not been carried out regularly, continuously and just only take place in one direction, which is only foreign students come to Vietnam to exchange, study and no Vietnamese students participate in exchange programs abroad (since 2015 there has been no additional tour of students exchange). Moreover, when compared to many universities in the country, it has not really grown and attracted large numbers of students, including Vietnamese and foreign students.

## **III. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be seen that, in the last 10 years, from 2014 to 2023, the international cooperation activities of the Trade Union University have been actively implemented in many fields, achieved many



significant achievements, contributed significantly to the performance of high-quality training and research tasks, affirmed and upgraded the position of the school. The achievements and contributions that the international cooperation activities bring to the school are not small. However, it cannot be denied that these activities still have many weaknesses, shortcomings, have not reached maximum effectiveness and exploited all its advantages, have not proportionated to the cooperation potential and the needs of the school.

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