

INDICATORS OF HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY IN VIETNAM AND COUNTRIES OF THE ASEAN +3 REGION

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Abstract: *Accessibility of higher education is one of the important indicators, which affects the social mobility of individuals and assesses the living standards of the population in all countries. The study aims to compare Vietnam's accessibility of higher education compared to other ASEAN + 3 countries through some basic indicators. The research was conducted through document analysis and with the help of secondary data from UNESCO and UNDP. The research results show that, among the 5 indicators assessing the accessibility of higher education, Vietnam only has significant achievements in ensuring gender equality through the gender parity index (GPI). For the remaining 4 indexes, Vietnam is still behind other countries in the region. This proves that access to higher education in Vietnam is still limited and not expanded, requiring greater efforts from within internal resources and international cooperation.*

Keywords: *higher education, accessibility of higher education, social inequality in education, student, Vietnam, ASEAN+3.*

INTRODUCTION

Accessibility of higher education plays an important part in the social mobility of individuals (White et al., 2020). On the other hand, accessibility of education is also one of the parameters in assessing the living standards of the population of a country (Ha et al., 2020). However, differences in accessibility of education and social inequality in education, especially in higher education, still exist in many countries (Mahdi et al., 2020), including Vietnam and countries of the ASEAN +3. Limited access to higher education is one of the reasons for decreasing personal income and a contributing factor to the slow socio-economic development of the country (Gegela, 2015). Therefore, improving the accessibility of higher education opportunities and reducing social inequalities in higher education are also central education policies in most developed countries (Walsh, 2016).

Barriers of higher education accessibility stem from many factors, notably, individual factors (gender, health, learning capacity, motivation, ...), family factor (income, education, occupation, parent's place of residence, ...), institutional factors (scholarship mechanisms and policies, tuition exemption and reduction, information, etc.) (Mullen, 2010).

Vietnam is one of the members of ASEAN +3 with a population of 96.208.984 people (General Statistics Office, 2019) and a GDP Annual Growth Rate of 7.017% in 2019 (The World Bank, 2019). Together with other countries in the region, Vietnam has paid much attention to education in general as well as higher education. In 2014 Vietnam has spent 20% of total budget expenditure on education, equivalent to 5% of GDP, and higher education accounts for 12.4% of total educational budget expenditure (Dinh, 2017). Meanwhile, other countries in the region such as: Japan (2016: 0.631% of GDP; 2017: 0.636% of GDP), Malaysia (2016: 1.111% of GDP;

2017: 0.982% of GDP; 2018: 0.957% of GDP); South Korea (2016: 0.886% of GDP) (UNESCO); China (2016: 1.5% of GDP) (OECD). Thanks to the considerable budget investment as well as the State policies for education and higher education, Vietnam has improved the quality of human resources for the country, contributing to accelerating the industrialization and modernization of the land. water and social sustainable development. However, compared to other countries in the region, the population classes' access to higher education is still limited (Lê, 2015).

Therefore, international research in the field of education is aimed at comparing the results of the functioning of national education systems, at studying the level of literacy and education of the population in different countries of the world. Half a century of experience in conducting such research shows that through them the development of new knowledge, improvement of the methodology is carried out, an understanding of research activities in the modern world is formulated, new prospects for the development of the education system are opening (Batyukova, 2010). Therefore, a comparative study of the social practice of accessibility of higher education in different countries, in particular, the comparison made among Vietnam and countries of the ASEAN+3 region not only contributes to the development of the methodology of the sociology of education but also enables countries to complement their own experience in educational policy (mainly through borrowing the merits of the systems of developed countries).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of “accessibility of education”

Accessibility of education is a term that has been studied in different fields of science. From the perspective of politics, the concept of "accessibility of education" is not only known as the ability to enroll educational institutions but also to the success of students (European Union). Therefore, “accessibility of education” is considered throughout the entire process from the student's enrollment to the completion of the course.

The concept of the term "accessibility of education" is also understood as the policy of accessibility of education. Accordingly, the policy of accessibility of education is the policy to expand the enrollment of all classes and strata in society (European Commission, 2014). Thus, according to this concept, “Accessibility of education” is to create equal opportunities for all to participate in education.

Under the perspective of pedagogy, "accessibility of education" is to increase participation in education and training of children and young people. According to Beliakov "accessibility of education" is the opportunity of citizens to study in educational institutions with the legal protection of this (Beliakov, 2009)

From the view of Skilbeck et al., the concepts such as: "access", "equal opportunity", "equality of outcomes" are often used in the field of educational policy. They agreed that "accessibility of education" is the ability to participate in education and training programs, to acquire knowledge, thinking, and skills (Skilbeck, 2000).

According to Martunova, the term "access" has substantial similarity to the term "opportunity". She considered the accessibility of education as an asymptotic phenomenon for everyone in society (Martunova, 2002).

Usher A., Cervenán A. emphasized that accessibility of education is an opportunity, the ability of people from any class or strata in the society to education (Usher et al., 2005).

Le Ngoc Hung considered the concept of "accessibility of education" in similarity with the concept of "social equality in education". He found that "social equality in education is

understood as the equality of educational opportunities, learning opportunities, most specifically, the equality of opportunities to go to schools of social groups" (Le, 2015).

The concept of “accessibility of higher education”

According to the Recommendation No. (98) 3 of the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe", the policy of accessibility of higher education is the policy aimed at expanding participation in higher education. study for all sectors of society and ensure the effectiveness of this participation (in other words is to ensure the conditions for completing this participation) (Council of Europe).

The concept of "Policy of accessing education" is close to social goals defined in the Bologna process. In 2007 in London, ministers agreed that "accessibility of higher education is the admission and completion of higher education at all levels of different population groups". The ministers also emphasized that "students can complete their courses without any obstacles related to their socio-economic situation" (London Communiqué).

According to Skilbeck et al. the terms "access", "equal opportunity", "equality of outcomes", "affirmative action" and "equity" are often encountered when analyzing higher education policy, in which the term "access" does not refer to social justice. The authors believed that the accessibility of higher education is the ability to enroll training programs, acquire knowledge, skills, techniques, and competencies (Skilbeck et al., 2000).

In the report "Global higher education rankings: accessibility and affordability - comparative perspective", Usher et. al. Identified that accessibility of higher education is the ability to receive higher education of all classes of society based on equality (Usher, 2005).

Shishkin reported that the issue of accessing higher education should be analyzed with the view of the difference in the opportunities of different social groups in accessing higher education. The author believed that the accessibility of higher education is not only an opportunity of enrolling in a higher education institution but also the process of completing the training program (Shishkin, 2005).

According to Ziderman, the concept of "accessibility of higher education" is composed of four factors: expanding access (increasing the number of students entering universities); increasing opportunities to access higher education for children of the working-class and ethnic minorities; ensuring their completion of training programs (analyzing dropout factors, for example, tuition fees increase) and ensuring first-year students' enrollment (Ziderman, 2013).

To sum up, accessibility of higher education is the equality of opportunities for higher education for representatives of social strata and groups, which differ in terms of socio-economic status, the cultural capital of the family, territorial, ethnic, and gender affiliation (Phung, 2010).

As such, accessibility of higher education is the equality of opportunities for higher education for representatives of social strata and groups, which differ in terms of socio-economic status, cultural capital of the family, territorial, ethnic, and gender affiliation (Ha et al., 2019).

The indicators measuring the accessibility of education

On the discussion of the indexes measuring the accessibility of higher education, There are many other views from scientists. For example, Belyakov believes that at present the accessibility of higher education should be assessed in terms of changes in the number of enrollments in universities, which is characterized by the number of students per 10 thousand people (Belyakov, 2009). Meanwhile, Usher et al. note that cultural capital globally plays an important role in the accessibility of education, in particular, children of the elite are more likely to pursue higher education than children from working-class families. Note that the concept of

“accessibility of higher education” defines the idea of equality in access to higher education for children from all socio-demographic groups. The higher the EEI, the more people have access to higher education, and a low index means more elitism among students (Usher, 2005).

Supporting this idea, the findings from the research on higher education access and inclusion in Vietnam by Hayden et al. (2015) show current status in Vietnamese higher education that opportunities from tertiary education have not been distributed equitably. Specifically, young people from urban areas, from better-off homes, and the ethnic majority groups seem more likely to have benefit. Girls also appear to have benefit, a trend that is a reverse of the past.

On the same track, Vu et al. (2018) analyzed the access and equity of the Vietnamese higher education system. The findings show that higher education in Vietnam has been facilitated and developed as the result of the economic reform “Doi Moi” in 1986. However, there are some groups lagged behind the overall progress, for example, low-income people and ethnic minority people. In the comparison between gender, females seem to have more advantages over males at higher education enrolment while men are more commonly to enter the labor market earlier or take vocational training than women. The findings also indicate that income and ethnicity are strong predictors for enrollment. Besides, Both father’s and mother’s education have a strong influence on their children’s enrollment at tertiary education, especially if a parent completed tertiary degrees.

One of the basic issues when studying the accessibility of higher education is quantification – the process to make the concept of “accessibility of higher education” become measurable. Usher et al. (2005) suggested four indicators measuring access to higher education, including:

- (1) percentage of university enrollment;
- (2) the proportion of people with tertiary education - those who have completed higher education (the number of people with university degrees from 25 to 34 years old);
- (3) Equity in education index - EEI is measured by the percentage of all females with a university degree between 45 and 65 years old, with the percentage of students whose father has a degree of higher education, the higher the index is, the greater the opportunities for accessing to higher education by different population classes, the lower this index, on the contrary, reflects the chances of accessing higher education mainly for higher social classes (having well-off socio-economic conditions);
- (4) Gender Parity index in education (GPI) is measured by the ratio of female students to the total.

According to the authors, these indexes are weighted 25%: 25%: 40%: 10% respectively in the formula. This formula is one of the most significant attempts to quantify the concept of "accessibility of higher education", which facilitates the following studies on this topic.

Having studied the relationship between affordability and accessibility, Shah (2006) continued to use these indexes: (1) participation rates; (2) attainment rates; (3) the educational equity index (EED); and (4) gender parity index (GPI). They are all the same indexes as in the study of Usher et al (2005). The difference between these authors is that instead of using the formula which is suggested by Usher, Shah compared these index independently among countries in her study.

Based on the study of Usher et al., Karpenko et al. (2009, 2014) also compared the accessibility of higher education in the Russian Federation and the OECD countries through the above indicators. Meanwhile, to compare the accessibility of higher education between the Russian Federation and other countries around the world, Elena (2011) used indicators such as (1) the number of students per 100000 people., (2) the tertiary enrollment rate of the population of college-age.

In conclusion, even though there is no universally accepted formula to calculate the “general index” of accessibility of higher education, there is a model of 4 indexes which is commonly accepted as follow: (1) participation rates, (2) attainment rates, (3) the educational equity index (EEI), (4) gender parity index (GPI).

In this study, we suggest a five-index model that includes these 4 indexes above and a new index that is the number of students in tertiary institutions to compare the accessibility of higher education among countries in the ASEAN+3 region.

METHODOLOGY

Document analysis method was used in this study. The statistics data come from UNESCO and UNDP. Among them, the study used data on youth participation rate in higher education (from 2016 to 2018), educational attainment (2016, 2018), and gender parity index (GPI) (from 2016 to 2018) from UNESCO. Statistics on the human development index of UNDP is the source of data on the participation of young people in higher education (2015, 2017, 2018) and index of social equality in education (EEI) (2017, 2018).

This study measures the accessibility of higher education of ASEAN +3 countries, including China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam through 5 indicators. These indicators have the characteristics and values shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Indicators characterizing the availability of higher education

Indicators	Characteristic
1. Youth participation rate in higher education	Decrease (increase) in the number of students over a certain period of time
2. Participation of young people in higher education	The proportion of young people enrolled in tertiary education in the total population of this age group
3. Educational attainment	The percentage of individuals with completed higher education in the aggregate of the population (25 to 64 years old);
4. Index of social equality in education (EEI)	Reflects the ratio of the prevailing socio-economic status of students and the corresponding characteristics of the population (the ratio of the percentage of men with higher education aged 45-65 and the percentage of university students whose fathers have higher education). High EEI values indicate that the composition of the student body corresponds to the composition of society as a whole, while low values indicate that young people from privileged families predominantly enter universities.
5. Gender parity index (GPI),	Reflects the ratio of men and women among university students; calculated based on gross enrollment. GPI = 1 corresponds to gender equality, and GPI values from 0 to 1 mean the predominance of men, values greater than 1 – the predominance of women

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An increase or decrease in the number of students studying at universities over a certain period of time reflects the access to higher education in countries (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of students in higher educational institutions among countries

Country	2016	2017	2018	Trend
China	43886104	44127509	44935169	↑
Japan	3846927	3853034	3861847	↓
S. Korea	3204348	3136395	3083800	↓
Indonesia	7614845	7944099	8037218	↑
Malaysia	1336550	1248927	1284876	↓ ↑
Thailand	2319717	2248761	2171663	↓
Vietnam	1767900	1707000	1526100	↓

Note: ↑ - increase; ↓ - decrease

Source: UNESCO (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx#>)

Comparison with other countries in other regions shows that from 2016 to 2018, the number of students studying at Vietnamese universities decreased quite rapidly. Compared to the data of 2016, the number of students decreased by 60 900 students in 2017. In 2018 it decreased by 241 800 students (compared to 2016) and by 180 900 students (compared to 2017). Although South Korea, Thailand also tended to decrease in the same period, the decrease was not as much and fast as Vietnam. Specifically, the number of South Korean students in 2017 decreased by 67 953 students compared to 2016; in 2018, it decreased by 120 548 students (compared to 2016) and by 52 595 students (compared to 2017). Meanwhile, in the example of Thailand, the number of students decreased by 70 956 students in the period from 2016-2017, in 2018, it decreased by 148 054 students (compared to 2016) and by 77 098 (compared to 2017). That proves that the opportunities for accessing higher education in these countries, especially in Vietnam, have certain limitations.

On the other hand, in other countries such as Indonesia, China, Japan from 2016 to 2018, the number of students entering universities tends to increase. Among them, China is the country with the fastest increasing speed. Compared to 2016, it increased by 241405 students in 2017, especially in 2018, after just 1 year has increased by 1049065 students. Or as in the example of Indonesia, the number of students also increased significantly, compared to 2016, there are an increase of 329254 students in 2017 and an increase of 422373 students in 2018 attending universities in this country. Thus, from the parameter of the number of students entering university shows, the opportunities to access universities of these countries are broader than that of Vietnam and the countries where research is conducted.

The proportion of people attending tertiary education is one of the most important parameters measuring access to higher education in different countries (Table 2).

Table 2. The proportion of college-aged people attending tertiary education

Country	2015	Ranking	2017	Ranking	2018	Ranking
China	39	4	48	3	51	2
Japan	62	2	63	2	-	-
S. Korea	95	1	93	1	94	1
Indonesia	31	5	28	6-7	36	5
Malaysia	30	6-7	44	5	42	4
Thailand	53	3	46	4	49	3
Vietnam	30	6-7	28	6-7	28	6

Source: UNDP (<https://www.undp.org/>)

The statistics from Table 2 show that, in 2015, 2017, and 2018, Vietnam was the country with the lowest tertiary enrollment rate of those in the age of enrolling in higher education institutions compared to other countries and had a downtrend. If in 2015, 30% of the Vietnamese population enrolling in universities, by 2017 and 2018, this rate will decrease by 2 percentage points (28%). Meanwhile, other countries, although there are changes over the years, all tend to increase the rate of enrollment in higher education institutions. Among them, South Korea is the country with the highest rate of tertiary enrollment among college-aged people, although this rate has fluctuated from year to year it was not significant (in 2015 it was 95%, in 2017 it was 93% and in 2018 it was 94%). Compared to Vietnam, the enrollment rate of college-aged people in South Korea was 65 percentage points higher in 2015 and 66 percentage points higher in 2018, which is nearly 3 times higher than Vietnam. Also, Japan is the country with the second-largest proportion of the population in college-age compared to other countries. In the comparison with the data of Vietnam, this rate is 32 percentage points higher in 2015, higher than that of other countries, and 35 percentage points higher in 2017.

In particular, China and Malaysia are two countries that have rapidly increasing tertiary enrollment rates for college-aged people and have had a gradual change in their ranks over the years. In 2015, only 39% of the Chinese population of college-age went to tertiary institutions, after 3 years, this rate increased by 12 percentage points which are nearly 2 times higher than that of Vietnam. For Malaysia, from 2015 to 2018, the college-aged population increased by 12 percentage points, and in 2018 it was 14 percentage points higher than in Vietnam.

Thus, there are major limitations in the university enrollment rate of the college-age population in Vietnam. This rate is less than one-third of the total population of university age. This proves that the opportunity to access higher education of Vietnamese people has not been expanded.

One of the most significant indicators to measure people's access to higher education in countries is the proportion of the population with tertiary education. This is shown in the research data in table 3.

Table 3. Share of the population by completed tertiary, population 25 to 64 years older

Country	2016	Ranking	2018	Ranking
China	-	-	17.0	3
Japan	48.0	1	48.6	2
S. Korea	46.6	2	49.0	1
Indonesia	8.2	6	8.8	6
Malaysia	9.7	4	-	-
Thailand	12.6	3	12.8	4
Vietnam	9.4	5	10.8	5

Source: UNESCO (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx#>)

The data from Table 3 show that Japan and South Korea are the two countries with the highest tertiary population compared to other countries (nearly 50% of the total population is of university age). In comparison with Vietnam, they are 5 times higher. At the same time, the

proportion of the population with tertiary degrees in these two countries tends to increase, especially Korea (an increase of 2.4 percentage points compared to 2016).

On the other hand, except for South Korea and Japan, the gap in the proportion of the population who have attained an education level among the remaining countries is negligible. For Vietnam, although the proportion of the population who graduated from universities has had a positive change, it is still at a slow rate (after 2 years, from 2016, an increase of 1.4 percentage points). However, in comparison to Thailand (with the growth of 0.2 percentage points) and Indonesia (with the growth of 0.6 percentage points), Vietnam is the country with the faster increase in the proportion of the population that has attained tertiary degrees since 2016. to 2018. This proves that, despite facing many difficulties in the development process, Vietnam is making significant strides in the trend of increasing the quality of highly qualified human resources in response to domestic development as well as international integration.

Accessibility to education in general and higher education, in particular, is an opportunity to participate in education, regardless of other factors depending on the family's gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic situation., ... Therefore, the level of access to higher education of a country cannot be ignored through the index of social equality in education (Table 4).

Table 4. Index of social equality in education

Country	2017	Ranking	2018	Ranking
China	0.571	5	0.573	4
Japan	0.835	1	0.836	1
S. Korea	0.720	2	0.702	2
Indonesia	0.520	6	0.511	7
Malaysia	0.670	3	0.627	3
Thailand	0.573	4	0.543	5
Vietnam	0.515	7	0.515	6

Source: UNDP (<https://www.undp.org/>)

The research data in Table 4 clearly shows that Japan and South Korea are two countries with higher social equality in education than other countries (in 2017, Japan: 0.835, South Korea: 0.720; in 2018, Japan: 0.836, South Korea: 0.702). This means that the level of social inequality in access to education in these two countries is lower than in other countries, and there is no significant difference in access to education among the population in Japan and South Korea. In particular, China is a country with a positive change in social equality in education, although this change is still slow (2017: 0.571, 2018: 0.573).

However, compared to other countries, Vietnam (along with Indonesia) is the country with the lowest social inequality index. Although in 2018, Vietnam's social equity index in education increased one level compared to 2017 in the rankings, this index stayed the same (0.515). Compared to Japan and South Korea, Vietnam has a gap of 6 and 5 ranks respectively in 2017 and a gap of 5 and 4 ranks respectively in 2018 in the ranking of the social equality index in education. Thus, the issue of social inequality in education in Vietnam still exists significantly, in this country there is a large gap in access to higher education among the population classes compared to other countries in the study. This indicates that access to higher education in Vietnam is largely for the upper social classes (with well-off socio-economic conditions), especially in the context of an increase in expenses for university studies, including tuition fees

and expenses for preparing for the annual national GCSE (such as extra classes at the end of high school).

The gender parity index is considered a very important indicator in assessing access to higher education in different countries (Table 5).

Table 5. Gender parity index in higher education

Country	2016	Ranking	2017	Ranking	2018	Ranking
China	1.169	5	1.172	0,172 5	1.178	0,178 4
Japan	0.904	1	0.912	0,088 1	0.918	0,082 2
S. Korea	0.786	6	0.791	0,209 6	0.803	0.197 6
Indonesia	1.118	2	1.128	0,128 2	1.134	0.134 3
Malaysia	1.147	4	1.138	0,138 4	1.184	0.184. 5
Thailand	1.289	7	-	-	1.410	0.410 7
Vietnam	1.121	3	1.133	0,133 3	1.046	0.046 1

Source: UNESCO (<http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx#>)

Research data from the table shows that, in 2016 and 2017, Japan was the country with the highest gender equality index in higher education (2016: 0.904; 2017: 0.912). Meanwhile, although South Korea is the country with the highest enrollment and university attainment population compared to other countries, it is also the country with the lowest gender equality index in higher education (the level of difference in gender equality in 2016: 0.211; 2017: 0.209 and 2018: 0.197). In particular, the proportion of men accessing higher education is higher than that of women (with Japan).

In addition, Thailand, Malaysia, China are also countries with lower gender equality index in higher education compared to other countries; in which, the percentage of women entering university is higher than that of men. In particular, although Vietnam has a low rate of enrollment and the population reaches tertiary education, it is a country that has made great progress in achieving gender equality in terms of access to higher education. . In 2016 and 2017, the difference in gender equality in Vietnam was 0.121 and 0.133, respectively (ranked the 3rd place). In 2018, the GPI of Vietnam is 0.046 (ranked the 1st place). Thus, access to higher education in Vietnam is open to both men and women. This is one of the indicators contributing to promoting sustainable development in Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

Comparing the opportunities to access higher education of some ASEAN + 3 countries, especially between Vietnam and these countries through basic indicators, the study draws the following conclusions:

From 2016 to 2018, the number of students studying at higher education institutions in Vietnam tended to decrease faster than in other countries for which the comparison was conducted. This shows the limitation of Vietnam's university admission opportunities in relation to the ASEAN + 3 country.

Vietnam is one of the countries with a population going to university less than one-third of the total population of college-age. Moreover, although Vietnam is one of the countries with

an increase in the proportion of the population with university degrees, it is still a slow growth rate compared to other countries, especially compared to Japan and South Korea.

On the one hand, the gap between population groups in access to higher education in Vietnam is still large compared to other ASEAN + 3 countries, which means social inequality in access. Higher education in Vietnam is one of the most urgent problems. However, compared to other ASEAN + 3 countries, Vietnam is one of the countries that has made progress in implementing gender equality in higher education, especially compared to Japan and South Korea.

Thus, of all the indicators measuring access to higher education, gender equality is the most significant indicator Vietnam has achieved. There are also other indicators such as the number of university students, the rate of university enrollment of the population in the college-age group, the proportion of the population with tertiary education, and the social equity index in education are low compared to other countries, especially in comparison with Japan, South Korea, and China. That also proves that opportunities to access higher education of the population strata in Vietnam are still limited and not expanded.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This study only compares the indexes of higher education accessibility among Vietnam and some countries in the ASEAN + 3 region. Meanwhile, there are many factors affecting the accessibility of higher education for individuals and groups of the population. Therefore, comparing the factors affecting the opportunities to access higher education among social groups in different countries, especially the ASEAN + 3 countries, is significantly valuable in the process of making educational policies.

Besides, the use of secondary statistics from different sources is also one of the limitations in comparing higher education accessibility indicators. Conducting surveys in countries to obtain primary data will have greater significance and more in-depth explanations about the causes and bases of differences in higher education accessibility among population groups of countries.

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