

Research Article

Sustainable Development of Education for Giang University - Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh

Huynh Thanh Tien^{1,2}¹An Giang University, Vietnam²Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**Abstract.**

The sustainable development goals (SDGs) or global goals have widely been stated in many countries and international associations in the world. The United Nations SDGs were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic, and environmental sustainability. The author of this article desires to explore the concept of ‘sustainability’ from the literature review and revise the three pillars of the ASEAN Community to find out the connectivity of the 17 SDGs with the ASEAN’s three pillars. Particularly, the author provided the Global Goal 4 – Quality Education in further detail. Then, this paper pointed out some findings through data collection from institutional document analysis and discussions. Findings indicated a clear imbalance between the human resources development and the training courses development of a university member in the system of Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh (VNUHCM). The paper ends with some recommendations for enhancing the ASEAN connectivity and the educational sustainability for development at VNUHCM’s university member.

Keywords: educational sustainability, quality education, the ASEAN Community’s three pillars, the sustainable development goal, VNUHCM

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1. INTRODUCTION

We all know that we face big challenges in today’s world: poverty, hunger, inequality and climate change are just some of the issues we need to address urgently. Big challenges need bold action to overcome them, and that is where the Global Goals come in. They are a plan agreed to by all world leaders to build a greener, fairer, better world by 2030, and we all have a role in achieving them. [1]

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1.1. What are Sustainable Development Goals?

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Countries have committed to prioritize progress for those who're furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls. The creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources from all of society is necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context. [2]



Figure 1: 17 SDGs. [3].

1.2. Goal 4 -- Quality Education

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is universal, holistic and indivisible, with a special imperative to leave no one behind. Education and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) – *ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* – plays a central role in building sustainable, inclusive and resilient societies. Education is a basic right and primary to human dignity. Education liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for self-respect. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of

opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a progressive, healthy society. Learning benefits every human being and should be available to all.

SDG 4 also has reciprocal linkages across the 2030 Agenda. Access to quality education is an avenue for social mobility and reducing inequalities. Education is essential for building the knowledge base we need to tackle critical challenges like climate change. Education will help youth prepare for employment in the high-skill jobs of the fourth industrial revolution. And education is a foundation for peaceful societies and effective institutions. Education is essential for sustainable development, but investments in education that are not accompanied by concurrent progress in other aspects of human wellbeing will fall short of enabling all people to realize their full potential in life. SDG 4 categorizes the following targets:

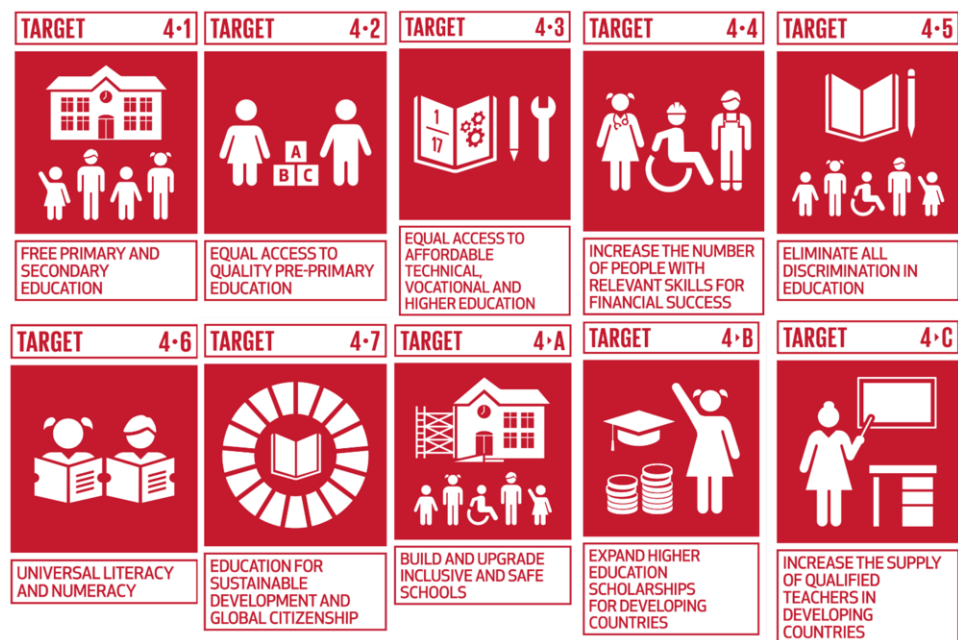


Figure 2: Summary of SDG 4's Targets. Source: [4].

1.3. Sustainability

The term “sustainability” is broadly used to indicate programs, initiatives and actions aimed at the preservation of a particular resource. It actually refers to four distinct areas: human, social, economic and environmental – known as the four pillars of sustainability [6].

TABLE 1: Explanation of the Targets of SDG 4.

<p><i>Target 4.1. Free primary and secondary education</i> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.</p>	<p><i>Target 4.2. Equal access to quality pre-primary education</i> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.</p>
<p><i>Target 4.3. Equal access to affordable technical, vocational and higher education</i> By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.</p>	<p><i>Target 4.4. Increase the number of people with relevant skills for financial success</i> By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.</p>
<p><i>Target 4.5. Eliminate all discrimination in education</i> By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.</p>	<p><i>Target 4.6. Universal literacy and numeracy</i> By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.</p>
<p><i>Target 4.7. Education for sustainable development and global citizenship</i> By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development</p>	<p><i>Target 4A. Build and upgrade inclusive and safe schools</i> Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.</p>
<p><i>Target 4B. Expand higher education scholarship for developing countries</i> By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programs, in developed countries and other developing countries.</p>	<p><i>Target 4C. Increase the supply of qualified teachers in developing countries</i> By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.</p>

Source: [5]

1.3.1. Human sustainability

Human sustainability aims to maintain and improve the human capital in society. Investments in the health and education systems, access to services, nutrition, knowledge and skills are all programs under the umbrella of human sustainability. Natural resources and spaces available are limited and there is a need to balance continual growth with improvements to health and achieving economic wellbeing for everyone. In the context of business, an organization will view itself as a member of society and promote business values that respect human capital. Human sustainability focuses on the importance of

anyone directly or indirectly involved in the making of products, or provision of services or broader stakeholders (the human capital of the organization) [7]. Communities around the globe may be positively or negatively affected by business activities, or impacted through methods used to source raw materials. Human sustainability encompasses the development of skills and human capacity to support the functions and sustainability of the organization and to promote the wellbeing of communities and society.

1.3.2. Social sustainability

Social sustainability aims to preserve social capital by investing and creating services that constitute the framework of our society. The concept accommodates a larger view of the world in relation to communities, cultures and globalization. It means to preserve future generations and to acknowledge that what we do can have an impact on others and on the world. Social sustainability focuses on maintaining and improving social quality with concepts such as cohesion, reciprocity and honesty and the importance of relationships amongst people. It can be encouraged and supported by laws, information and shared ideas of equality and rights. Social sustainability incorporates the idea of sustainable development as defined by the United Nations sustainable development goals. The principle of sustainable development addresses social and economic improvement that protects the environment and supports equality, and therefore the economy and society and the ecological system are mutually dependent [8].

1.3.3. Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability means that a business needs to be growing and profitable to be sustainable, without profit the organization would not survive. It focuses on the efficient use of resources to improve profitability and achieve economic growth to improve the standards of living. This however should not happen by neglecting the other areas of sustainability, but there should rather be a synergy to create prosperity without negatively impacting people, society, and the environment. In recent years, governments have been promoting research to close this gap and design new regulations aimed at solving or reducing the problem. The circular economic model has also been proposed as a way to overcome some of the issues of the current linear model. The circular economy is changing the traditional way of doing business by pursuing zero waste policies and mindful use of natural resources [9].

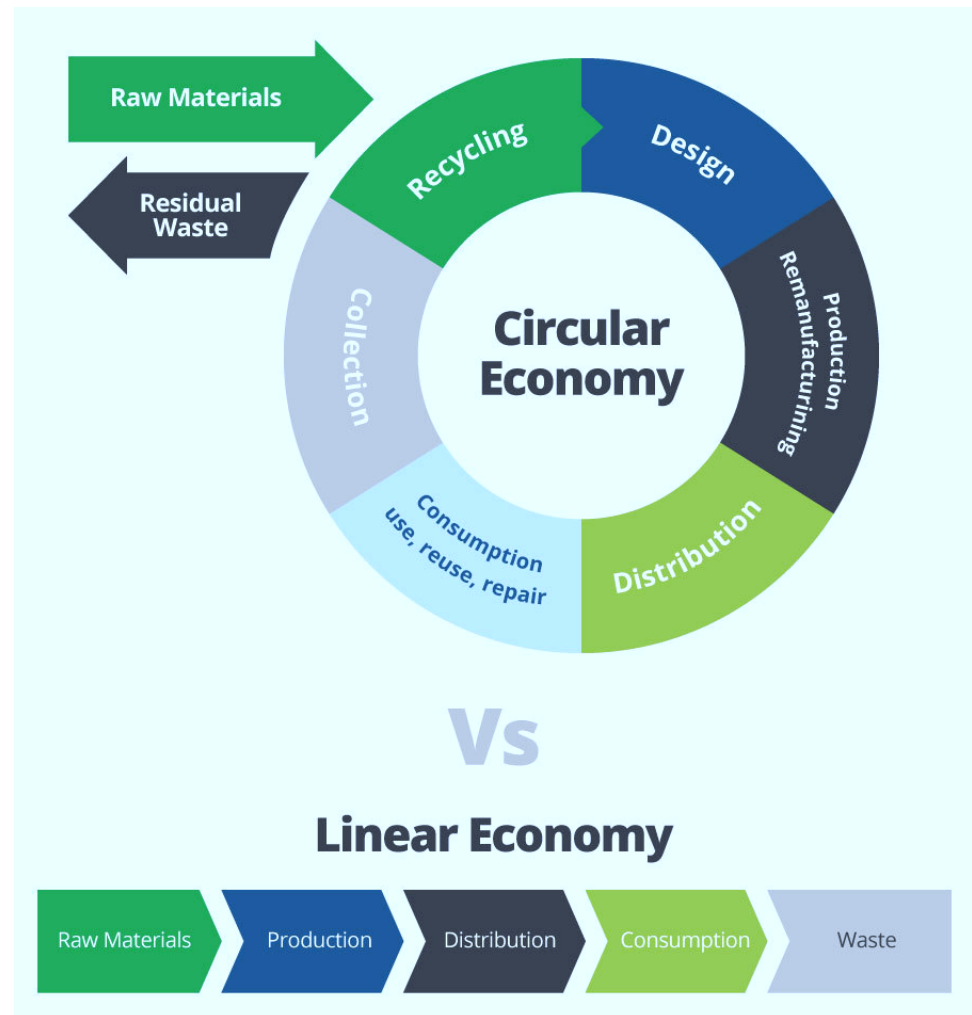


Figure 3: The Diagram of Circular Economy vs Linear Economy Adapted from [10].

1.3.4. Environmental sustainability

Environmental sustainability aims to improve human welfare through the protection of natural capital (e.g. land, air, water, minerals etc.). Initiatives and programs are defined environmentally sustainable when they ensure that the needs of the population are met without the risk of compromising the needs of future generations. Environmental sustainability, as described by (Diesendorf, 2000), places emphasis on how business can achieve positive economic outcomes without doing any harm, in the short- or long-term, to the environment. According to [8] an environmentally sustainable business seeks to integrate all four sustainability pillars, and to reach this aim each one needs to be treated equally.

The principle of the four pillars of sustainability states that for complete sustainability problems to be solved in relation to all four pillars of sustainability and then need

be maintained. Although in some cases these may overlap, it is important to identify the specific type of green business to focus on, as the four types present unique characteristics. Businesses need to make a strategic decision about it so as to effectively incorporate the chosen approach into their policies and procedures.

1.4. ASEAN Community with three pillars

ASEAN's vision is to realize dynamic cooperation among Southeast Asian countries in a peaceful, stable and prosperous manner. This vision is the result of the agreement of the Leaders of ASEAN countries. This vision is then realized through three pillars of ASEAN Community.

1.5. Pillar 1: ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC)

This pillar supports relations in the political and security fields among ASEAN Member States. With this pillar, ASEAN Member States continue to uphold peace and avoid political and security tensions. ASEAN Head of State or Government will always adopt peaceful ways in overcoming any differences and disputes among Member States. ASEAN Leaders also seek to create a conducive political situation, develop norms for living together, prevent conflicts among Member States, and resolve conflicts with the best mechanism. Several agreements in the political and security fields have been signed by ASEAN as follows:

Declaration of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) signed in Kuala Lumpur on 27 November 1971;

ASEAN Declaration on the South China Sea signed in Manila on 22 July 1972;

Declaration of ASEAN Concord signed in Bali on 24 February 1976;

Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) signed in Bali on 24 February 1976;

Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty) signed in Bangkok on 15 December 1997;

Declaration of ASEAN Concord II (Bali Concord II) signed in Bali on 7 October 2003

Bali Concord III signed in Bali on 17 November 2011.

1.6. Pillar 2: ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

This pillar supports achieving the ultimate goal of economic cooperation between Member States, namely a stable, prosperous and competitive economic region. This is done by implementing free flow of goods, services, investment and capital among ASEAN Member States, while at the same time trying to reduce poverty and minimize socio-economic disparities. Therefore, a strategy that can unite the potentials in each Member States is needed in order to increase ASEAN's economic competitiveness. The agreements signed include the followings:

- Accelerating the integration of several sectors of economic activity, namely the air transport sector, agriculture-based production, automotive, e-commerce, electronics, fisheries, health services, rubber production, textiles and clothing, tourism, and wood-based production;

- Facilitating the mobility of entrepreneurs, skilled and talented workers;

- Updating mechanisms and steps that can strengthen the implementation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area or AFTA, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services or AFAS, and the ASEAN Investment Area or AIA;

- Strengthen mechanisms within ASEAN's institutions.

1.7. Pillar 3: ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC)

This pillar is a partnership of Southeast Asian countries that care for each other and form a common identity. The aim is to foster cooperation in the field of social development so as to improve the standard of living of disadvantaged groups in society. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community seeks to improve the quality of human resources in ASEAN, reduce unemployment, eradicate poverty, reduce social inequality, and increase equality in economic growth.

The efforts that have been made by ASEAN include the following:

- Social welfare, family and population program;

- Health care program for the elderly;

- HIV/AIDS treatment program;

- Occupational safety and health network;

- Program for preparing young people to face globalization;

- Network of 17 universities in ASEAN Member States;

Student exchange between ASEAN Member States and youth forums;
Annual cultural week, youth camp and ASEAN quiz;
Media exchange program;
Framework for Environmentally Sustainable Cities development;
Agreement on handling transboundary pollution.

The three pillars of ASEAN cooperation will continue to be strengthened in the future, especially now that Indonesia holds ASEAN Chairmanship 2023. This ASEAN Chairmanship brings continuity to the agenda of Indonesia's G20 Presidency. ASEAN as a cooperation forum that has been running for a long time is expected to be able to respond to future issues and challenges through these three pillars [11].

1.8. Is there a Need of a Second Official Language for a Stronger Connectivity in the ASEAN Community?

The idea of an "official language" for ASEAN has been an argumentative issue over the years. Recently, the issue has resurfaced. In March 2022, Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob suggested to take Bahasa Melayu or Malay the second language of ASEAN, alongside English as the working language in the ASEAN community. He added that the Malay language is actually already used in several ASEAN countries such as Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines and parts of Cambodia. In response to the Malaysian Prime Minister's opinion, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno LP Marsudi stated that his idea should be discussed further with ASEAN members whereas Indonesian Education, Culture, Research and Technology Minister Nadiem Makarim firmly rejected Malaysia's idea. This Minister gave an example that the European Union (EU) recognizes 24 official languages in the EU, and the African Union accepts Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Swahili and "any other African language" for its union. He commented that Indonesian is spoken only in Indonesia and understood to a certain degree by Malay speakers in Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei. Malay is spoken in Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei and understood to a certain degree by Indonesian speakers. However, the two languages are not understood by other ASEAN nations such as the Philippines, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia. He considered that the idea of nominating one language to do the work of many is absurd.

ASEAN aims to facilitate economic, political, security, military, educational and socio-cultural integration between its members and other countries in Asia. ASEAN's objectives are to stimulate economic growth and through that social progress and cultural development as well as to promote regional peace and stability based on the rule of law and the principle of the United Nations charter. Therefore, imposing one of the ASEAN languages as an "official" language diminishes other countries' sovereignty and national identity because language is part of national identity. ASEAN was founded on the principle of mutual respect among its members, including the acknowledgement of each country's sovereignty. It should have a better and stronger connectivity to promote improved mutual understanding among its member states and its people (Pamungkas, 2022). He added that ASEAN is not only huge in size but also diverse in terms of cultures, faiths, ethnicities, traditions and, of course, languages. Unfortunately, connectivity in the region remains poor. He asked if ASEAN citizens really feel part of the region, or are they just Indonesians, Malays or Thais who happen to live in their countries. Thus, he concluded that giving privilege to a particular language in the region by nominating it as a "second official language" of ASEAN is a mistake and it even undermines the basic spirit of ASEAN [12]

1.9. Education for sustainable development for An Giang University, VNUHCM

1.9.1. Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh (VNUHCM)



Figure 4: Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh (VNUHCM).

Located in the eastern part of HCMC - the most developed urban area of Vietnam, Viet Nam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNUHCM) was established in 1995 by

the government to create a training center for undergraduate, postgraduate and science research, following high-quality and innovative multidisciplinary technology. VNUHCM serves as the core of the higher education system and dedicates to the needs of socioeconomic developments.

With the total area of 643.7 hectares built under modern university city model, VNUHCM is one of the largest educational institutions of Vietnam. The university has 27 units of training, scientific research and technology transfer, as well as 8 member units: The University of Technology, University of Science, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, International University, University of Information Technology, University of Economics and Law, An Giang University, Institute for Environment and Resources, and VNUHCM Ben Tre Campus.

VNUHCM has over 60,000 full-time students with an academic team of more than 300 professors and associate professors and above 1,200 doctors. As the leading higher education system of Vietnam, the training program of VNUHCM includes 99 disciplines/groups of disciplines, ranging from technology, natural science, social sciences and humanities to economics, healthcare. It also has 121 master's degree training majors and 89 doctoral ones.

Defining its vision as a top university system in Asia, VNUHCM for many consecutive years has been ranked in the top 150 universities in the Asian continent by the Quacquarelli Symonds Asia Education Organization (QS). In 2019, VNUHCM maintains its ranking in the top 701-750 by the QS UK, evaluating over 1,000 leading universities in 82 countries.

To connect and serve the community is one of VNUHCM's core values. Annually, its revenue from technology transfer and serving the community reaches over VND 150 billion. Along with an international network of academic partners, leading educational institutions from Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Australia, VNUHCM has actively updated the most advanced educational trends in training and research activities. This has enhanced its position and prestige in the international academic community. "Promoting social progress" is the idea that the world's top universities pursue. This is also the mission committed by VNUHCM [13]

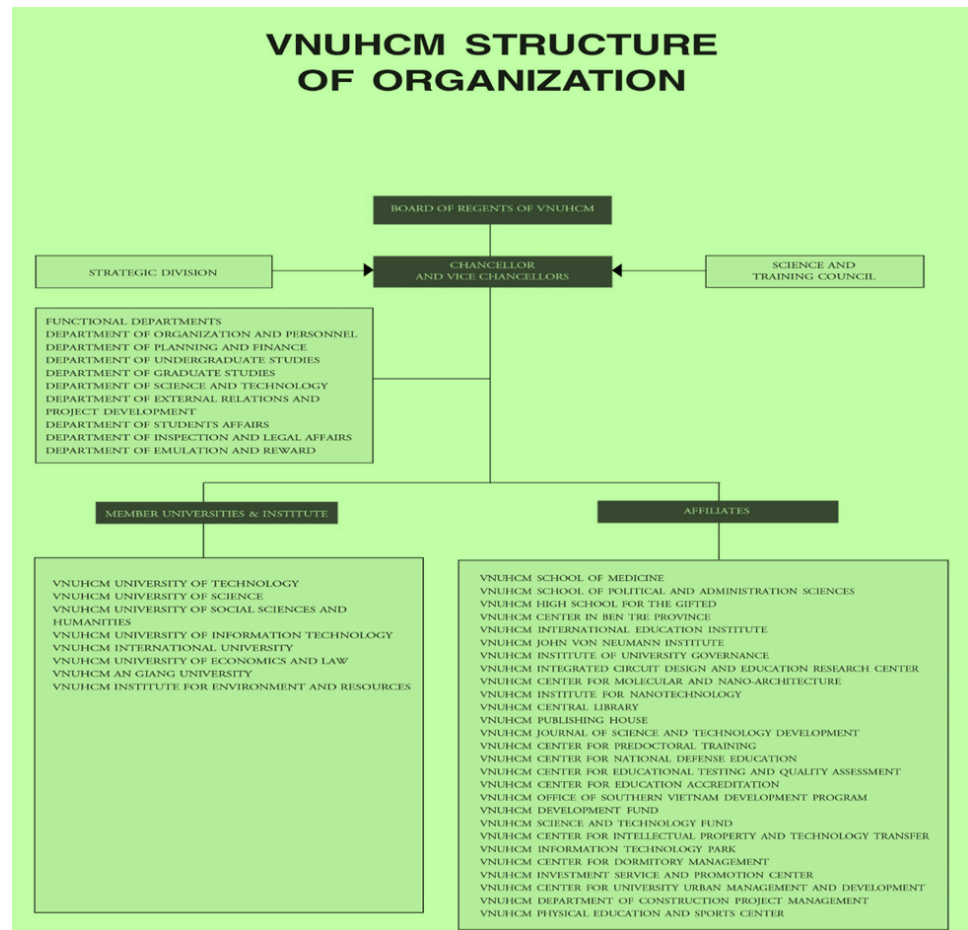


Figure 5: VNUHCM's Organizational Structure.



Figure 6: An Giang University (AGU).

1.10. An Giang University (AGU)

An Giang University (AGU) was established on the basis of An Giang College of Education, in accordance with the Prime Minister's Decision No. 241/1999/QĐ-TTg dated December 30, 1999, as a public training institute in the universities of Vietnam. On March 16th 2018, AGU was awarded a Certificate of Quality Standard at the Higher Education Institution by the Center for Education Accreditation, VNUHCM, and on August 13th 2019, it officially became a member institution of VNUHCM. Since March 2019, AGU officially became an associate member of the AUNQA Quality Assurance Network organization under the ASEAN Universities Network (AUN). The university has 30 units including 8 faculties, 2 departments, 10 functional offices, 8 centers, the library and

the school of practical education with the responsibility of training human resources, conducting research, transferring technology and providing community services. It has a staff population of 819 persons in which there are 424 qualified lecturers (95.51% of them holding MA and PhD degrees). In 2021, the university has 5 MA training courses, 39 undergraduate training courses (in which there are 3 advanced training courses), 20 three-year-college training courses and 23 in-service short-training courses. Figure 3 below demonstrates AGU’s organizational structure (AGU-VNUHCM, 2021).

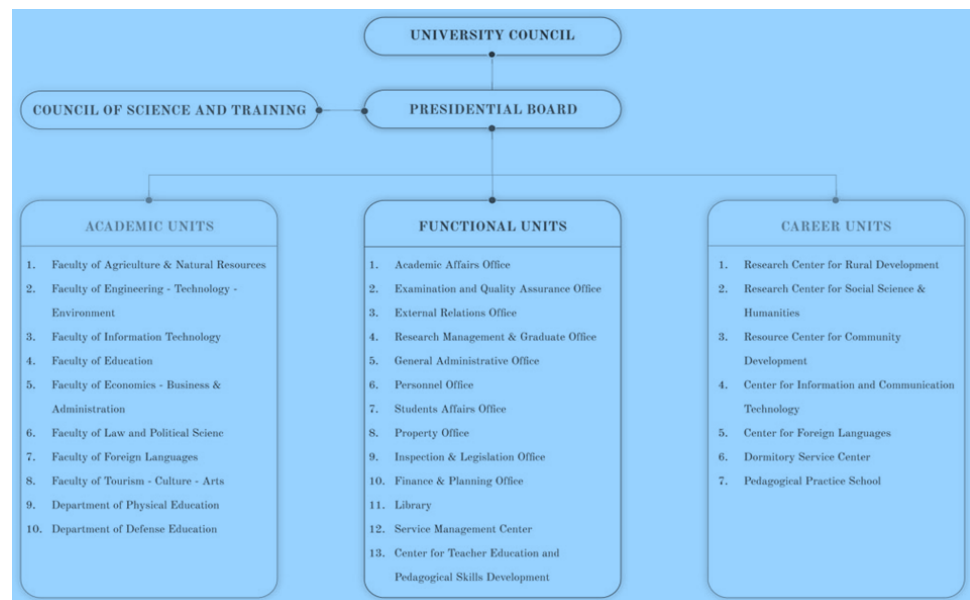


Figure 7: AGU’s Organizational Structure.

1.10.1. An Giang University's Imbalance in Human Resources Development and its Training Courses

AGU’s human resource development and its training programs from 2015 to 2023 can be shown in Table 3.

TABLE 2: AGU’s Increasing Number of Qualified Staff and Lecturers (*) from 2015 to 2023.

No. of staffs and lecturers in 2015				No. of staffs and lecturers in 2020			
PhD	MA	BA	others	PhD	MA	BA	others
43	398	293	96	76	423	200	113
				No. of staffs and lecturers in 2023			
				86 (+ 10)	413 (-10)		

(*) Notes: According to Vietnam Education Law 2019, qualified staffs and lecturers must at minimally hold

Source: [14]

The following diagram illustrates the development of training courses delivered at AGU from 2015 to 2023.

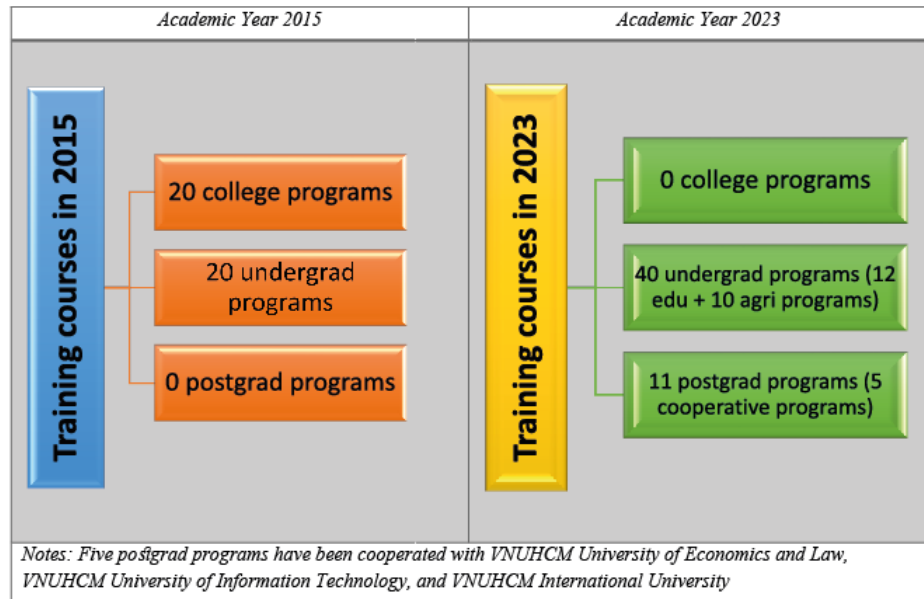


Figure 8: AGU’s Development of Training Courses from 2015 to 2023.

According to the statistical data from AGU’s Office of Personnel and Politics in 2023, the numbers of staff and lecturers from the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources are seen from Table 4 and Table 5.

TABLE 3: The Number of Staff and Lecturers from the Faculty of Education in 2023.

Total No. staff and lecturers (71)				No. of staff and lecturers attending higher level courses (12)			
PhD	MA	BA	others	Postdoctoral	Doctoral	Finished	Unfinished
15	55	1	0	1	11	9	2

TABLE 4: The number of Staff and Lecturers from the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources in 2023.

Total No. staff and lecturers 76				No. of staff and lecturers attending higher level courses 11			
PhD	MA	BA	others	Postdoctoral	Doctoral	Finished	Unfinished
33	41	2	0	3	8	7	1

In reality, in the academic year of 2023, there are 3 BA training courses from the Faculty of Education (Chemistry Education, Physics Education, and Civics Education) that are stopped for enrollment by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Meanwhile, the number of new students registering to study in the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Agriculture and Natural Resources is annually reducing. Consequently, numerous lecturers of these two faculties are having few and even no classes to teach,

and they are going to be in dismissal. Also, there is a 'red alarm' that more training courses from the two faculties cannot continue to remain.

One of the causes of this negative situation is that it is very hard for the graduates from the field of education and agricultural science to find high-salary jobs. Moreover, families and societies consider that future teachers and agricultural engineers (merely a new form of farmers) are not rich. Even more education and agricultural science graduates are unemployed in Vietnam's current employment market. Another reason is that most available training courses from the two mentioned faculties now are mono-disciplinary whereas nowadays there is a tendency to develop multi-disciplinary training courses.

2. CONCLUSIONS

From analyses and discussion above, the author of this paper desires to suggest some recommendations for strengthening the connectivity of the ASEAN community and promoting the sustainable development of education and training for AGU-VNUHCM as follows.

In the aspect of strengthening the connectivity of the ASEAN community, there is no need of choosing any other language in the ASEAN community to develop it as a second official language of the community. Instead, English as the working language or the globalized English language or 'ASEAN Englishes' should be taught at schools and universities in ASEAN countries. Moreover, ASEAN cultures and languages should be encouraged to teach in ASEAN University Network to embrace diverse cultures and traditions among its member states.

In term of developing the sustainability of education and training for AGU-VNUHCM in the future, this university need to focus on carrying out the following initiatives. Firstly, AGU-VNUHCM in particular and all higher education institutions in Vietnam and in the ASEAN community should reconsider their human resource development that meet the need of their communities and societies. Secondly, they should focus on innovating developing new and multidisciplinary training research courses suitable for nations' and localities' demands of socioeconomic development. Last but not least, in order to enable ASEAN students to learn and understand more about the ASEAN community, in addition to developing multidisciplinary research and training courses, AGU-VNUHCM and other institutions in VNUHCM system as well as the ASEAN University Network (AUN) need to generate a particular training course related to the ASEAN culture and

study for students to study so that they should deserve to become truly responsible ASEAN citizens and global citizens.

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