

POLITICAL COURAGE OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH CENTRAL VIETNAM

Nguyen Huu Quyet⁽¹⁾, **Tran Thi Thuy**⁽²⁾

¹ *Vinh University*

² *Nghe An Provincial Political School*

Received on 19/3/2021, accepted for publication on 27/5/2021

Abstract: The training of young generation's political courage has been one of the key missions of Vietnamese entire political system in the context of the country's deepening international integration. Over the past decade, the higher education institutions nationwide and in the North Central region of Vietnam in particular have geared much focus towards this mission. However, very little empirical research has been carried out to determine the effectiveness of training students' political courage. The aim of this article, therefore, was to investigate the status quo of this training mission for students at the universities in North Central Vietnam through which it could dig out the efficiency and weaknesses of this mission. More than one thousand targeted students of the North Central region's institutions were surveyed using questionnaire-based method. The data collected reflected students' political knowledge, political will, and political beliefs resulting from their own institution political training outcomes. The findings showed that the efficiency of training students' political courage outweighed the weaknesses, sparking on the importance of appropriate methods of training and prevalent characteristics of students in the region. This results also questioned into the needs for feasible solutions to address the existing shortcomings, and suggest further studies on a similar mode of training students' political courage at other nationwide institutions.

Keywords: Political science; political education; political courage; North Central region.

1. Introduction

Throughout its history, the North Central region of Vietnam has created many talents and formed a variety of good cultural values. Generations of students in this region have been imbedded to the values and spirit of the previous generations, constantly training their political courage to assert themselves in many fields. Training political courage has long been an important requirement and task of university students nationwide in general and in the North Central region in particular, particularly given the present context that the Party, the State and the educational system are promoting the training of political courage for the young generation and promote the implementation of Resolution No. 35-NQ/TW of the 12th Politburo on "Strengthening the protection of the Party's ideological foundation, fighting against wrong and hostile views in the new situation." This issue has come to the fore as the requirement and responsibility for the Party members and cadres in the context of internal reactionaries and hostile forces' maneuver to take advantage of social networks, internet connections, domestic and foreign forces and means in order to promote "self-evolution", "self-transformation", and

Email: quyetnh@vinhuni.edu.vn (N. H. Quyet)

to formulate opposition within the Party as well as undermine national solidarity, to its end, the collapse of the Party. However, training students' political courage as an issue of particular concern remains ineffective in terms of training, education, and propaganda for students. Likewise, it has not been discussed deeply by scientists, educators and activists to promote students' political courage as a solid ground to protect the Party's ideological foundation, the State policy, and many beyond. As a result, far no effective solutions have been found to improve the political courage of students, particularly those in the North Central region, to serve the aforementioned objectives as well as to contribute to prevention of negative effects from life. Therefore, training students' political courage in general and in the North Central Vietnam has become an urgent and increasingly vital issue.

This paper attempts to provide theoretical background of students' political courage, evaluate students' political courage of students at the universities in the North Central region, and propose fundamental solutions to improve the political courage of university students in the North Central Vietnam.

2. Political courage and reality of political courage of students at the universities in North Central Vietnam

2.1. Political courage and political courage of students

Political courage is the dialectic synthesis of political stance, political qualities and political capacity. It is a requirement to ensure that each person has the correct political orientation, always takes a control of himself (his behaviors and attitudes) as well as his situation. That is the firmness, consistency and proactiveness both in the mind and action in the face of life's difficulties and challenges, just as Lenin (2005: 474) said: "If during the struggle against the bourgeoisie, the the proletariat does not train itself to be tough-minded, disciplinary and loyal, which are the qualities necessary to ensure the proletariat's complete victory over the enemy, it is impossible to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat." To promote the role of the young generation in the cause of national building and defense, the 10th Congress of the Vietnamese Student Association set out the goal of "building a contingent of students in the new era with revolutionary ideals, strong political courage, rich patriotism, and responsibility for the country..." (Vietnamese Student Association, 2019, p. 70)

Tran (2006: 14) defines political courage to be "the collection of positive and progressive qualities through which each individual's actions in political activities are oriented in a positive direction (in terms of the ultimate results) to bring a certain victory to a political event." Tran contends that political courage is demonstrated in temperament and quality, in which political quality is the factor that strictly defines political courage. Without enough political qualities, it is impossible to have a solid political character, leading to wrong thinking and action. In similar fashion, Nguyen (2006: 173) views the youth's political courage as "the ability to perceive politics correctly to adopt the right political attitude, which is in line with the Party's point of view, to reserve their perseverance to fight ..." In his book entitled "Building the Youth's Courage Today", Ho (2003) holds the view that courage is a very important factor in personality development, talent development and success in career and life. The author believes courage is a basic

factor between morality and talent, converging both morality and talent, but it is a relatively independent, irreplaceable factor. Therefore, political courage is seen as “a quality of life of young people, the millennials aged from 18 to 35, with a firm attitude in life, from thinking to studying, from disciplining oneself to contributing to society” (Ho, 2003: 70). International scholars also conceptualize political courage in a similar way. Sparks (2009) points out that political courage is an attribute that people, including the young, inherit from traditional values and socio-historical and political processes, and nourish it and keep going when confronted with an obstacle or with danger in life or in a political event. Arendt (1998) and Bickford (1996) contend that political courage is simultaneously a principle that guides political attitude and enables action in the presence of fear, and a practice that is displayed, performed, and given life in action.

Students are the elite force amongst young people, but so far there have been no studies on students’ political courage. The current revolutionary practice requires students to possess important qualities such as political knowledge, political will and political beliefs. These three factors form a solid foundation for creating a stable political status, ensuring the correct political orientation, which is in accordance with the requirements of society. Therefore, it can be understood that the student’s political courage is the synthesis of political knowledge, political will and political beliefs, which is formed and trained from the university to contribute to the build-up and defence of the Fatherland. On this basis, the authors use these three factors as the criteria to evaluate the political courage of university students within the scope of the study.

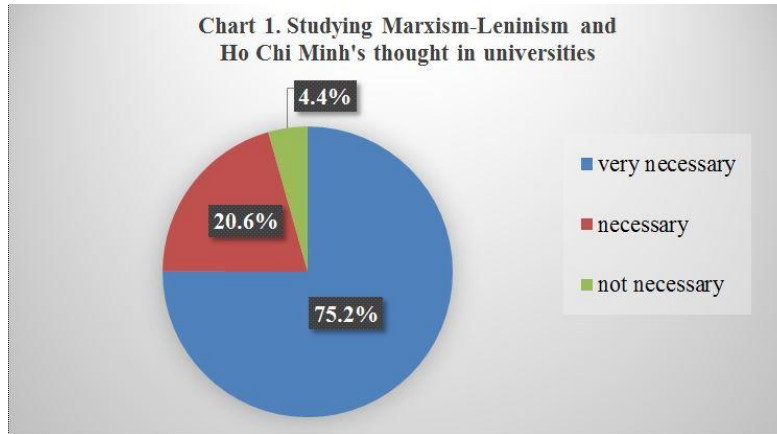
2.2. Results in enhancing political courage of students at the universities in the North Central region

North Central Vietnam consists of six provinces, including Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue. The impact of historical and geographical factors has formed a distinctive character of students of the universities in the region. This quality is easy to distinguish these students from their counterparts of other regions of the country. Over the past years, the universities in the North Central region have focused on improving political knowledge, training students’ will and confidence in order to produce a high-quality human resource to meet development requirements of the region and the country. Of the six provinces in the North Central region, five have established universities (except Quang Tri province). In order to shed light on the current political courage of students, the authors conducted a sociological survey at five universities in which a total of 1036 students had participated in the investigation (Hong Duc University (Thanh Hoa Province); Vinh University (Nghe An Province); Ha Tinh University (Tinh Ha Tinh); Quang Binh University (Quang Binh Province); Hue University of Economics - Hue University (Thua Thien Hue Province)). The survey results show that the improvement of the political courage of university students in the North Central region has achieved many positive results, as follows:

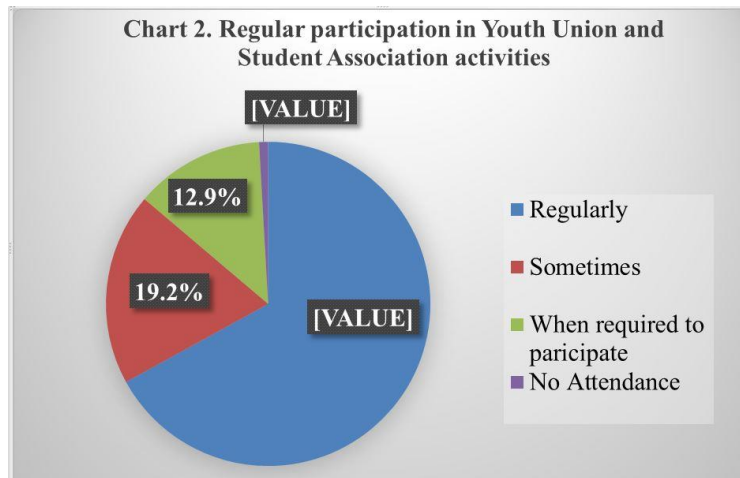
First, students actively practice political knowledge

The universities in the North Central region focus on equipping students with general scientific knowledge before they study specialized courses. As a result, students can understand deeply about the political theories and doctrines, gain a lot of useful insights into political ideology, the theory of building institutions, the process of drafting,

issuing and implementing policies. In particular, the majority of students are highly aware of the need to study Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh’s thought (75.2% of the surveyed students affirmed the *very necessary* level of these two courses as presented in Chart 1).



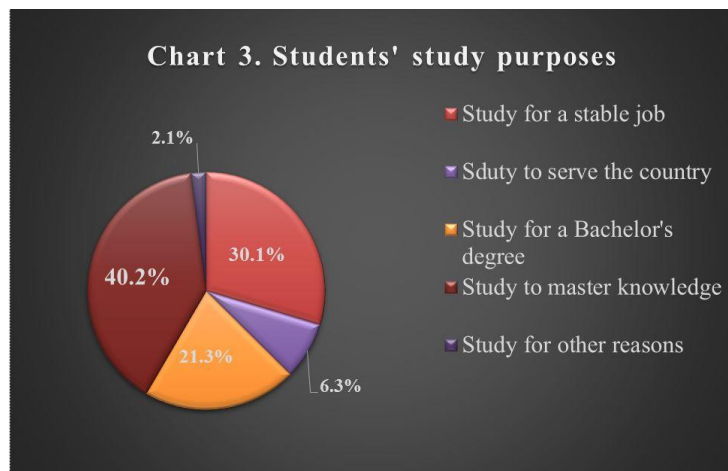
This demonstrates the appropriateness of ideological orientation for students by the universities in the North Central region. In addition, 67% of the students, as presented in Chart 2, affirmed that they regularly participate in the Youth Union activities and are interested and increasingly involved in socio-political issues of the country, localities and universities. From the practical activities of the Youth Union, many students have achieved the meritorious titles, such as “Student of 5 Merits” (This title is awarded to outstanding students in order to recognize the efforts of each individual in training, perfecting themselves according to 5 criteria: Good academic performance; Good morality; Good skills; Good integration; Good physicality), “Star of January”, etc. Many of them have been lionized as a paradigm for others to emulate: they participate in scientific research activities, they lead a healthy life, and many achieve high performance in their academic study. Also, many students were honored to be in the ranks of the Party, contributing to forming a generation of youngsters in the North Central region who kindle aspirations to rise, take the initiative to discover the unknown path in search for knowledge and edification.



Second, students actively train political will

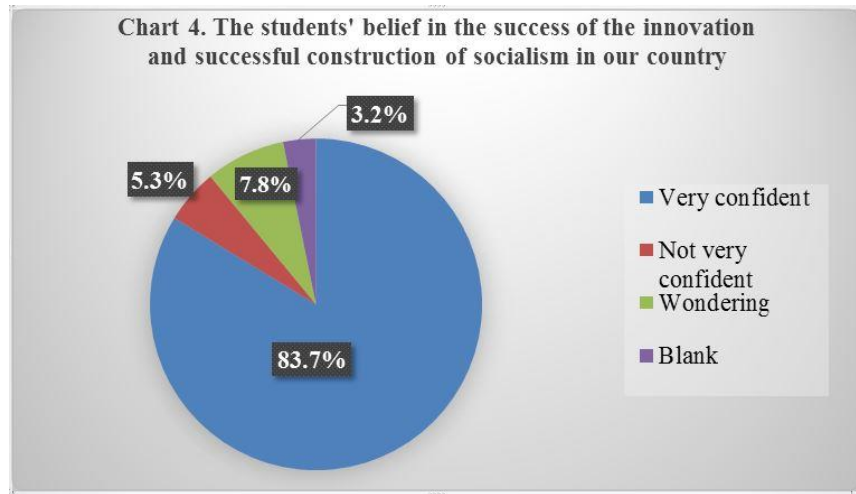
Most students exhibit their ability to think and implement the course of action independently and proactively. Students have actively engaged themselves in social activities that bring positive results, such as academic clubs, volunteer clubs, hobby clubs, and aptitude clubs. In addition, some students also partake in large and small job-oriented projects which are both practical and directly beneficial to the community. For instance, in 2019, students of Hong Duc University won the title “Excellent initiative” at the “National Startup Festival”. Vinh University, from 2015 - 2020, organized more than 80 seminars, conferences, advisory forums for students; implemented 7 training courses on “Starting a business”; organized dozens of soft skills training courses, “E-commerce” and Talk Show. These activities help students instill their confidence and determination in pursuit of the designed objectives, have a better career orientation, and provide more job opportunities.

The student’s political will is reflected in identifying purposes and the perseverance and courage to reach the purposes, the highest of which is to become a strong professional preparer in order to start a career after graduation. When asked about their study purposes, the majority of students confirmed that they studied to master knowledge (40.2%); followed by for a stable job (30.1%) and for university degree (21.3%), respectively (see Chart 3). The students have demonstrated their independent and proactive will when determining study purposes, from which they will persevere in overcoming difficulties and challenges in pursuit of their goals. In that process, students must embrace self-reliance, actively explore new things and draw experiences to achieve the highest results.



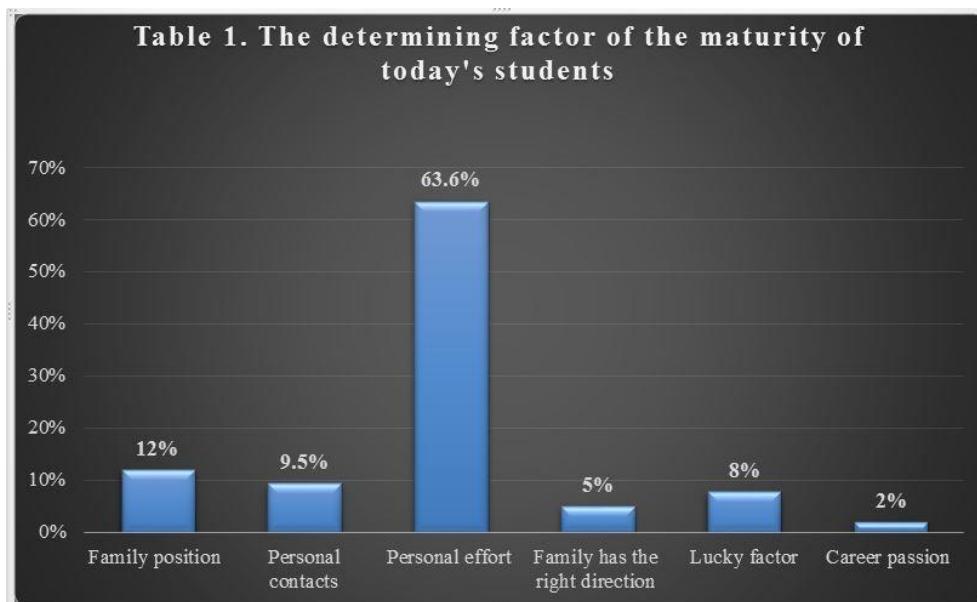
Third, students actively horn political beliefs

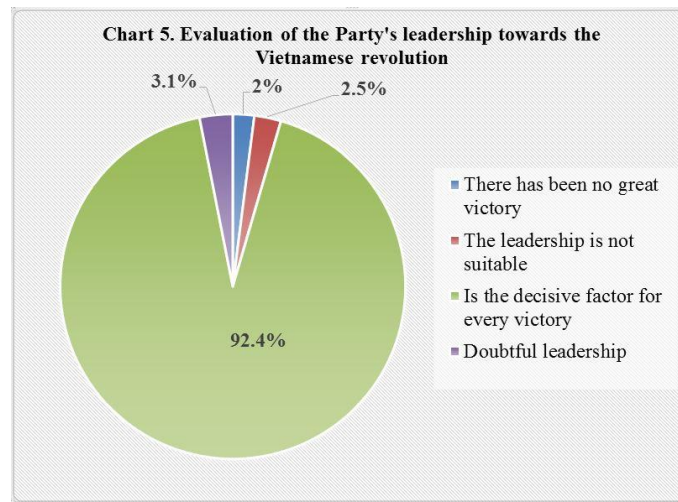
Political belief is the core factor that forms the political character of students based on the close combination between political knowledge and political will. Survey results show that the majority of university students in the North Central region believe in the country’s success in its endeavour to innovation. The relatively clear difference between the level of “Very confident” of 83.7% of the students and “Not very confident” of 5.3% of the students, as indicated in Chart 4, shows that the students have appropriate political beliefs.



This is the complete opposite of those who do not have political beliefs or indifference, and those who are apathetic about the socio-political problems of the country.

The students' political beliefs reflect their positive political awareness. Students understand that it is the industrious, hard-working, studious qualities that are the typical symbols of North Central culture, viewed as the decisive factors for personal success. As a result, 63.6% of the surveyed students affirmed that the determinant of students' maturity today is personal effort (Table 1). Political beliefs motivate students to actively train and strive to be in the ranks of the Party. In the past 5 years, the universities in the North Central region have admitted nearly 2,000 students, completing the set targets. Seeing the achievement that the Party has led the Vietnamese revolution over the past 90 years, 92.4% of the surveyed students affirmed that the Party's leadership is the decisive factor for every victory for the Vietnamese revolution (Chart 5).





2.3. Limitations and problems in the political courage of university students in the North Central region today

Despite many important achievements, however, there remain some limitations and problems in the political courage of university students in the North Central region. A minority of students who have adopted an apathetic attitude in political life and harbour misconceptions about the political situation. From the inadequate awareness of the nation's guiding ideology, students doubt the leadership of the Party, which leads to unscrupulous statements and actions both in daily life and on social networks. Since they are unclear about the learning purpose, or abivalent when choosing a job and following their career path, their motivation to learn has been critically damaged. Many students stay away from community activities and do not participate in extracurricular activities held by the Youth Union. Many students also demonstrate skepticism about the success of the path to socialism. Back in time a few decades ago, being in the ranks of the Party was the desire of the majority of young people; however, today, some students think that it is not necessary to strive to become a party member. That is also one of the reasons for the inadequate rate of party membership compared to the current student force. Therefore, the decline in the number of membership in the Communist Party in recent years has become a really an alarming situation in the political ideology.

The cause of the shortcomings and weaknesses stems from many factors. First, it is the trend of globalization and the flip side of the market mechanism that has affected ideology, morality, lifestyle of students, which in turns, undermine their political courage. Second, the "Peaceful Evolution Theory" of hostile forces makes it difficult to orient the education of students' political courage. It can be said that the development of society engenders the materialism which affects the students' will to strive. In addition, students are also responsible for their weaknesses and limitations in political courage. Students at their age are reaching a state of physical and mental maturity. They enjoy rich psychological lives with diverse personal needs. However, the downside of this age group is the lack of subjectivity, and easy to be attracted by the downside of the market mechanism, such as individualism. In fact, the line between being scrupulous and unscrupulous is very fragile, and it is easy to penetrate each other. A majority of students are prone to falling into a negative cycle of society, deteriorating in morality and

personality. There are many undergraduates, and graduates, since they are driven by desire to land a good job and enjoy an affluent material life, they are willing to give up their dreams, even manage to be a charlatan whose job is irrelevant to their training skills at university, and immoral to society.

Given the current situation of political courage of university students, a number of issues that need to be addressed today:

First, the contrasting picture between the need to improve political courage for the sake of all-round development and the degradation in political ideology, morality, and lifestyle of a small contingent of students. Currently, many students have incorrect motives and learning attitudes. Many students only wish to have a degree without concern about qualification, skills and knowledge. Some students are apathetic to country's political situation, afraid to participate in social activities, vacillatory in ideological stance, and enjoyable with debauchery lifestyles. They deny the revolutionary achievements that generations of Vietnamese people have sacrificed their blood and bones to make. Many students are also lamented, if not frustrated, about the shortcomings of the country, disparaging the country, instead advocating the Western lifestyle myopically.

Second, the contradiction between promoting the political courage of students and a perplexing reality. At university, in the classroom, in the family, through the Youth Union and Student Association activities, students can hear lectures on theoretical issues about scientific knowledge, the will and energy to overcome difficulties. However, real life is often contrary to what has been learned. The growing gap is directly affecting the political courage of students every day.

Third, this dissonance between the job demand for students after graduation and the scarcity of vacancies in the market. The desire of students after graduation is cowed by the harsh reality of unemployment. Many cannot find a job which offers them the opportunity to take advantage of their right expertise. Many cannot live up on low salary, and such pittance cannot help them to pay the bills. This has and is causing many repercussions to the society, which not only causes a great waste of human resources but also affects students' beliefs.

3. Fundamental solutions to improve the political courage of university students in the North Central region

Enhancing education to improve students' political courage is an urgent issue that requires the coordination and participation of all levels, branches, agencies, units and universities with many synchronous solutions, in which the following main tasks and solutions should be paid more attention:

First, enhancing the leadership of the Party and the administration of the State over students. Strengthening the propaganda of the Party's guidelines, the State's policies and laws, and the universities' rules and regulations in order to create a sense of student responsibility towards themselves, their university and society. It is important and decisive in enhancing students' political courage. If well implemented, this solution will contribute to students' political orientation and creating legal basis for the universities to carry out the mission of training the young generation.

At this point, the universities need to improve the training of political theory for students, effectively implement Conclusion 94-KL/TW dated March 28, 2014 of the Secretariat on “Continuing to innovate learning political theory in the national education system” in which it should be geared towards raising students’ awareness of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh’s thought, guidelines of the Party, policies and the law of the State. In addition, the universities need to actively innovate both the contents, programs and methods of education in a way that the courses and messages should be delivered short, easy to understand, suitable for students regardless of their fields of study. Gradually, the political program will instill a sense of confidence and credence in Party amongst students. At the same time, the universities need to improve the quality of the contingent of teachers of political theory, in which attention should be paid to improving the political quality and revolutionary morality of lecturers

Second, attaching importance to the fine traditional education of the homeland and the nation in order to foster proper feelings for students. The North Central region is home to many desired traditional values and practices. People in this region, for many generations, have been famous for typical qualities, such as being diligent, hard-working, and strong-will. Currently, globalization and international integration have become a prevailing force, an inevitable trend that changed many cultural elements and ways of practice, but these fine cultural values are still manifesting their strong vitality and endurance. For this reason, the universities need to arouse national pride, indomitable spirit of autonomy and resilience of the North Central people; the spirit of overcoming difficulties, creativity in learning and scientific research; the spirit of building up collectivism, sense of community and social responsibility of students; the traditional education of being diligent and self-disciplined, etc. Also, students should be urged to actively participate in volunteer and social activities and learn skills necessary in the industry revolution of 4.0.

Third, promoting the role and responsibility of the Youth Union and Student Union in enhancing the political courage of students. These organizations need to enhance the political courage education for students in diversified forms, which are associated with the implementation of Directive No. 05-CT / TW dated May 15, 2016 of the Politburo about promoting learning and following Ho Chi Minh’s ideology, morality and style, orienting students to practice, striving to achieve desired quality of a “Student of 5 Merits”, at the same time creatively and effectively promoting the campaign “The Vietnamese youth to study and follow Uncle Ho’s words” to make it a consistent and regular activity of educating students, creating a positive change in thinking and action of the majority of students. It is of a crucial note that organizing practical activities should pay special attention to the ideological orientation and elaboration of the examples of good people with good deeds to create spillover effects on the student community; at the same time, it is necessary to pay more particular attention to the age-specific characteristics, avoidance of formality.

Fourth, promoting the role of self-training for individuals to improve political courage. The transformation from knowledge, will, and belief into political courage demonstrated in practice requires students to train themselves to adapt to the lifestyles of each university. This process can be considered as a form of activity that students

conduct with the aims of mastering the knowledge system and skills, either taught by universities or not. However, in order for the training process to achieve good results, it is necessary or students to be self-disciplined and self-aware to make the “process of studying at university” to be the “process of life-long learning”.

Fifth, promoting the Part membership among students. Increasing the Party membership among students not only contributes to supplementing the vigor and mentality of the Party, but through that, it also strengthens and enhances the political courage for students. This work has posed difficulties when some students feel “mundance” to be member of the Party, because they think that employment opportunities in state agencies are narrowed. In the meantime, the decline in the number of enrollment has also been the culprit of the situation. The Party Committee and administrators of universities need to pay special attention to fostering the force, enrolling excellent students to the ranks of party. In addition, it is necessary to enhance the core role of the Youth Union and Student Association in discovering and fostering outstanding students for the Party.

Sixth, orienting vocational training to meet social needs. Our country has been experiencing many advantages as well as disadvantages in the trend of international integration. Thus, students should be free from some dogmatic and rigid ideas that once dominated the outlook to life of graduates, such as “job seekers”, “available jobs”. They should adopt a new way of thinking “job finding people”, “flexible work”, “available work”. Before entering the university, students re-evaluate their own personalities, qualities, and capacities. They may need to investigate in the market to find out more about the market for their jobs. In addition, the universities and localities need to have many orientations and synchronous solutions in creating jobs for students, such as loans to create jobs. They need to pay attention to some skill-training programs so that students can take part in the global workforce. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the connection between universities and businesses in order to improve the quality of training to meet output standards and to bridge the gap between universities and enterprises.

4. Conclusion

Students are an elite part of society with the mission of carrying on the arduous but laudable tasks of leading the country. Under the leadership of the Party, this force continues to assume the task of building and defending the Fatherland of the Socialist Vietnam. Students of the universities in the North Central region are also facing difficulties and challenges, such as difficult living conditions, high rate of unemployment, and low income. In the meantime, dissidents and anti-Communist party forces are contriving to evoke animosity, to cause political instability, and to waver in students’ confidence. That reality sets out the requirements of training students’ political courage to create a strong future human resource, who are “optimistic” and “high-qualified”.

REFERENCES

- Arendt, H. (1998). *The human condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bickford, S. (1996). *The dissonance of democracy. Listening, conflict, and citizenship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Ho, B. T. (2006). *Building up the courage of the current Youth*. Hanoi: Youth Publishing House.
- Lenin, V. I. (2005). *Complete Works*, Vol. 43. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- Nguyen, H. D. (2003). *Educating and training young people according to Ho Chi Minh's ideology and views of the Communist Party of Vietnam*. Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House.
- Party Central Committee (2015). Directive No. 42-CT/TW on "Strengthening the Party's leadership in the education of revolutionary ideals, ethics, cultural lifestyles for the young generation in the period of 2015 - 2030".
- Spark, H. (2009). Dissident Citizenship: Democratic Theory, Political Courage, and Activist Women. *Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 9(1), 74 - 110.
- The Communist Party of Vietnam (2011). *Document of the 11th National Party Congress*. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- The Party Committee of Hong Duc University (2020). *Political Report* (submitted to the Party Congress of Hong Duc University for the term 2020-2025).
- The Party Committee of Vinh University (2020). *Political Report* (submitted to the Party Congress of Vinh University for the term 2020-2025).
- The Party Committee of Ha Tinh University (2020). *Political Report* (submitted to the Party Congress of Ha Tinh University for the term 2020-2025).
- The Party Committee of Quang Binh University (2020). *Political Report* (submitted to the Party Congress of Quang Binh University for the term 2020-2025).
- The Party Committee of University of Economics - Hue University (2020). *Political Report* (submitted to the Party Congress of Hue University of Economics - Hue University, term 2020-2025).
- Tran, T. (2006). *Political courage with the capacity of leaders and managers in the current political system in our country*. Hanoi: National Political Publishing House.
- Vietnamese Student Association (2019). *Document of the 10th National Student Association Congress (term 2019-2023)*. Hanoi: Youth Publishing House.

TÓM TẮT**BẢN LĨNH CHÍNH TRỊ CỦA SINH VIÊN
CÁC TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KHU VỰC BẮC TRUNG BỘ HIỆN NAY****Nguyễn Hữu Quyết⁽¹⁾, Trần Thị Thúy⁽²⁾**¹ Trường Đại học Vinh² Trường Chính trị Nghệ An

Ngày nhận bài 19/3/2021, ngày nhận đăng 27/5/2021

Giáo dục bản lĩnh chính trị cho thế hệ trẻ đã và đang là một trong những nhiệm vụ trọng yếu của toàn hệ thống chính trị trong bối cảnh hội nhập quốc tế ngày càng sâu rộng của đất nước. Trong suốt thập niên qua, các cơ sở giáo dục đại học trong cả nước nói chung và các trường đại học tại khu vực Bắc Trung Bộ nói riêng đã tập trung triển khai công tác giáo dục bản lĩnh chính trị cho sinh viên. Tuy nhiên cho đến nay rất ít công trình khoa học nghiên cứu, đánh giá hiệu quả của công tác này tại các cơ sở giáo dục đại học. Do đó, mục đích của bài viết này là tập trung phân tích, đánh giá thực trạng giáo dục bản lĩnh chính trị cho sinh viên các trường đại học tại khu vực Bắc Trung Bộ nhằm đánh giá hiệu quả và hạn chế của công tác này. Tác giả đã tiến hành khảo sát hơn 1000 sinh viên các trường đại học tại khu vực Bắc Trung Bộ bằng phiếu bảng hỏi. Các số liệu thu thập phản ánh bản lĩnh chính trị của sinh viên thông qua các tiêu chí đánh giá về tri thức chính trị, lập trường chính trị và niềm tin chính trị. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy hiệu quả của công tác giáo dục bản lĩnh chính trị cho sinh viên các trường đại học tại khu vực Bắc Trung Bộ nổi trội hơn các hạn chế. Nguyên nhân chủ yếu xuất phát từ việc các trường đại học áp dụng phù hợp các phương pháp giáo dục và do những đặc trưng nổi trội của sinh viên khu vực Bắc Trung Bộ trong quá trình tự rèn luyện. Trên cơ sở các kết quả nghiên cứu về nội dung, phương thức giáo dục bản lĩnh chính trị cho sinh viên các trường đại học tại khu vực Bắc Trung Bộ, bài viết đưa ra các giải pháp khả thi đối với việc giải quyết các hạn chế hiện nay trong việc giáo dục bản lĩnh chính trị cho sinh viên tại các cơ sở giáo dục đại học, đồng thời gợi mở hướng nghiên cứu tiếp theo.

Từ khóa: Chính trị học; giáo dục chính trị; bản lĩnh chính trị; Bắc Trung Bộ.