

SOME SOLUTIONS FOR ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDIES IN FIELD OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN VIETNAM

Dr. Nguyen Quang Tuan

National Institute for Science and Technology Policy and Strategy Studies

Abstract:

The effectiveness of studies in the field of social sciences is the obtained result of research activities in comparison to the initially set-up targets. This effectiveness is affected by numerous factors, internal and external research activities. This paper is focused on analysis of some solutions to enhance the effectiveness of studies in field of social sciences in Vietnam.

1. Global view on the effectiveness of studies in field of social sciences

There exist, in practice, many ways to understand and interpret the concept of effectiveness. *In this paper, the concept of effectiveness of an activity is interpreted as the obtained result of the activity in comparison to the targets initially set-up or the problems to be solved (Fraser, 1994; Erlendsson, 2002).* The assessment of effectiveness of an activity is to measure the obtained results in comparison to the targets initially set-up or the problems to be solved. Here the measurement is based on qualitative and quantitative indicators. For example, in economic projects, the economic effectiveness is assessed by the rate of the returned value to investment capital value (*Return on Investment - ROI*) which is calculated by the formula:

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Return from investment} - \text{Investment costs}}{\text{Investment costs}}$$

This assessment indicator, however, turns out incorrect for evaluation of quantitative targets of other projects, namely for enhancing the awareness or establishing the social faire platform.

Social sciences is the field of sciences to study the relations between peoples and the society. The assessment of effectiveness of social sciences studies is more difficult than other fields of activities because of the specific features of social sciences. Social sciences studies include various types of studies,

namely fundamental research, applied research and research and development (R&D). Fundamental research is to create basically novel knowledge of objects and social phenomena. Applied research is to create also novel knowledge which is oriented to actual targets. R&D is to create new products, systems or services for improvement of existing ones. Therefore, every type of social sciences studies has its own targets and then the assessment of obtained results is conducted according to initially set-up targets. In practice the assessment of difficulty level is based on the definition of measuring indicators, but the latter for novel knowledge of objects and social phenomena are very difficult to be defined.

Social science activities have many different points in comparison to other sciences in terms of subjects and research methods. For example, when comparing natural sciences and social sciences we note the difference in research objects (which are natural phenomena for natural sciences and which are human behaviour and activities for social sciences), research methods (which are focused on values and logic reasoning for natural sciences and which are inspired mindset and imagination capacities) [3]. However, the differences in research methods vary also in time. Actually many methods of natural sciences are applied for social science research and versa. Outputs of social science research are also different from the ones of other sciences. Outputs of social science research, holding intangible values, are more diversified than the ones of natural sciences [1]. Therefore, it is not easy to set-up indicators for evaluation of effectiveness of social science research.

The evaluation of effectiveness of social science research is not limited simply by evaluating of outputs but of the whole process from input resources, outputs up to final results of research. The evaluation includes also the assessment of social changes which are targeted by the research work. For example, in research project entitled “Study of socio-economic reasons of migration from rural areas to urban areas to build a program to limit the migration and to prevent social conflicts in industrial areas”, the outputs are papers and some other publications which provide the main findings stating the socio-economic reasons of migration. Outputs can be also recommendations of policies for migration related problems. These outputs can be used by decision-makers as inputs for preparation of migration related policies. The final result of research works is to contribute to prevention and settlement of social conflicts in industrial areas. The effectiveness of social science researches can be seen through short, middle or long visions.

Outcomes of social science research can be used for planning development policies and creating of public use products. From market point of view, outcomes of social science research mainly create commodities of public nature which can be used by any individual without blocking other individual to use them. A public commodity has the following two features: i) *non-excludability* which means that the producer cannot prevent others from using these products, and ii) *non-rivalry* which means that many individuals can use these commodities at the same time [6]. In this example, outputs of social science research gather fully these two features. The *non-excludability* and the *non-rivalry* do not encourage private sector to invest for development of these commodities. Therefore, the State is the main investor for social science researches, and the evaluation of effectiveness of social science researches is based mainly on production of public commodities. In many cases, the evaluations are of qualitative nature. Outcomes of social science researches are easily-stolen subjects. This problem, if remaining without adequate solutions, would cause impacts to enhancement of quality and effectiveness of social science researches.

2. Elements impacting the effectiveness of social science researches

Since social science research is based mainly on inspired mindset and imagination capacities of researchers, then the environment for creative working is an important element to impact the quality and effectiveness of research results. Recent studies show that the institutional environment is one of the key elements impacting social science activities [2]. Restricted environment of democracy and freedom of creative activities would limit the creativity of social science researchers. In societies of low democracy level or high dictatorship level, social sciences is difficult to have room for development. They are deeply politicized (*UNESCO, 2010*).

Today when we are facing global scale problems and complex social policies, the social science researches serving policy planning activities are found very necessary in all the countries. But it is not necessary to have the important role of evidence-based policy planning in every country and at any time. It is not rare to see some impacts of extravagant concepts among policy makers. Some policy makers, when following the extravagant concepts, create gaps between knowledge producing and knowledge using processes in social sciences. Then social sciences becomes objects of political manipulations and then deeply politicized.

In Vietnam context of strong promotion of industrialization, modernization and globalization, many problems of development policies and strategies and needs of solutions of conflicts between economic development and

social equalities require a more pro-active involvement of social sciences. The latter should be properly positioned to solve problems posed towards social development. The environment democratic, equal and transparent are important background for social sciences to carry out well these tasks.

During process of Doi Moi, the Party and the State are full of decision, in development of the country, to follow the targets of rich people, strong nation and equal-democratic-civilized society. In this context, the environment for social science research is increasingly improved. However, some problems still remain in these efforts. The surveys made by a group of the author and researchers in social science organizations in Hanoi, Hue, Da Nang, Hochiminh City and Can Tho, show that there are some researchers which are not satisfied with research environment in our country. According to them, social science research still hole of many “sensible” areas or “taboo” topics or some things like that when the research results may be interpreted as political orientation of researchers. The nature of scientific research is to create new knowledge and veritable nature of phenomena or objects. The scientific researches have to have standard values among which the *disinterestedness* and the *skepticism* should be respected. The *skepticism* in social science research should be treated as a normal and natural phenomenon. The *skepticism* would produce real social counter-arguments and then lead to better changes.

The State financial management mechanism is factors impacting the effectiveness of scientific research. For example, according to actually valid regulations stipulated in Circular No. 44/2007/TTLT/BTC-BKHCHN on financial mechanisms for S&T research topics/projects, the highest funding for a social science research project is limited by VND 12 million. It is a normal practice that research teams at Ministry level need to break down to 30 - 40 research topics for financial settlement procedure. Possibly it is very difficult to find out somewhere some things similar to the ones in this aspect in our country.

To conduct a research well, participants have to put many efforts to read and analyze relevant documents, conduct surveys, synthesize findings on basis of creative mindset and capacities of research team. However, costs for these parts of work are not reflected well in the actual State financial management mechanisms. For example, according to actual regulations, the maximal cost norm for an information supply for a survey inquiry is VND 70,000. This norm would be acceptable by low-income information household-suppliers, but difficult to be accepted by enterprises-suppliers. Globally, the cost norms regulated by the State mechanisms respond too slowly to changes of market mechanisms. More than that, surveys by

inquiry are only one research method. In social sciences research, surveys by interviews and participant observations are very popular but these terms are not seen through actually valid State financial regulations.

In addition, actual regulations fix VND4 million of payment for report of treatment and analysis of survey data of a research topic/project. It is another regulation not based on actuality of research projects. For example, a social science research gathers 200 survey inquiries and then they are processed by computer SPSS software. To produce the data and treatment/analysis report, the research team needs to carry the following set of activities: encoding, loading data via SPSS software on the basis of encoding data, assessing and analyzing data. Surveys are one of the top important components which decide the success of a science research project but they are not supported by adequate financial mechanisms. Therefore, in practice, researchers need to reduce the volume of this work or “hide” them somewhere in “specific” research topics or “scientific workshops”.

In summary, the actual financial mechanism in Vietnam still keeps many inadequate elements which cause the low effectiveness of social science studies. They lead also involved sides, in scientific research in general and in social science research in particular, to lie. They are also a gap for a part of researchers to justify illegal incomes.

Scientific ethic aspects are also important elements to impact the quality and effectiveness of research activities. They include main ethic concepts of scientific research which clearly identify acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The scientific ethic concepts are based on faith: researchers trust that the results of other researchers are valid, and the public also trusts that the results of scientific researchers are faithful and not pre-judged. This faith, however, can be kept on when the community researchers contribute themselves for research values on basis of scientific ethic concepts [4].

There exist some important causes to make necessary to have ethic standards for research activities. *First*, the research ethics help to produce new knowledge, verity, to avoid mistakes, to prevent the distortion of research data or copy attempts. *Second*, the research ethics contribute to protect benefits from IP assets and enhance the cooperation within the scientific research community. *Third*, the research ethics secure the liability of researchers toward the public and help them to gain supports from the public in their endeavor. *Fourth*, the research ethics can promote numerous spiritual and social values, such as responsibility, human rights and law enforcement.

In industrial developed countries, the research ethic standards are introduced in schools and universities, and universities and research institutes hold the respective visions to this matter. The North America prestigious universities have Ethics Committee Review Commission to consider all the research activities related human and animal nature, the aspects sensible to individuals and community and the problems of frauds and copy attempts.

In Vietnam the ethic aspects do not get yet important attention. In practice, plagiarism actions get popular in our country. They are problems to block the development of scientific research. Once the scientific ethic aspects are not respected, the creation environment is eroded and this would encourage frauds and tricks in scientific research.

3. Some solutions to enhance the effectiveness of social science research

From the effectiveness point of view, this research paper proposes the following solutions to enhance the quality and the effectiveness of social science research.

First, The State science management authority needs to build up basic indicators for assessment of effectiveness of social science research, and then the supports for social science research should be based on the effectiveness criteria. The assessment of effectiveness includes quantitative and qualitative aspects based on short-term, middle-term and long-term visions. On this basis, there will be established a more complete view of the State and the whole society on the role of social sciences in this important stage of industrialization and modernization of the country. Then the adequate investment mechanism will be developed for social sciences, and the sources will be mobilized for social science, in particular, and S&T, in general, to become driving force for development.

Second, though the social research environment in our country, in general, is progressive but it is necessary to improve further in terms of democracy and transparency. The latter are pre-conditions to enhance the effectiveness of social science studies. Since the promulgation of the S&T Law in 2000, Vietnam has passed a large socio-economic development and S&T development. It is time already to amend the S&T Law to make S&T give more contributions to efforts for industrialization and modernization process of the country. There are needs to provide new regulations related to social sciences to create a more democratic and creative environment for social science studies.

Third, it is necessary to renovate State financial management regulations for S&T activities in general and for social science in particular. The renovation

of State financial management mechanisms should be oriented to rise investments and mobilize sources for social science, to renovate mechanisms of expenditures for social science research activities which would fit specific natures of scientific research. Cost norms for research activities need to be more dynamic and flexible to reflect market practice as well as to promote the lump-sum mechanisms and tough quality control of research activities.

Fourth, the research ethics becomes a hot problem in our country. To enhance the effectiveness and quality of social science research activities, we need to build up and develop the system of scientific ethic concepts. The State science-technology management agencies are required to issue the basic scientific ethic principles for scientific research activities which would be legalized by State regulatory documents. On basis of these basic ethic principles, the State encourages S&T organizations in general and social science organizations to set up research ethic rules specifically related to their nature of activities./.

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