

**A VIETNAMESE HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY: IMPROVING CURRICULA,  
TEACHING FOR HIGH QUALITY GRADUATE LABOR SUPPLY**

**By**

**Bui, Hien Thi Thu**

**THESIS**

Submitted to  
KDI School of Public Policy and Management  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

**MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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In recent years, Vietnam has been faced with the dilemma of an ever increasing demand for education balanced against a limited supply of scarce resources. Tradition of theoretical teaching and learning has shown its setbacks in producing human capital for the country's industrialization and modernization. Thus, there has been increasing pressure to upgrade and modify the quality of teacher training, teaching, and curricula to produce graduates with skills needed in the evolving labor market. The satisfaction of these demands on the educational system will be essential to the country's high quality human resources and future development. Creative and innovative approaches are advocated but still difficult to be realized. That said, there has been a general recognition and acceptance that change in curricula and teaching is needed but how it should be is still controversial although many initiatives have been underway.

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher education reform has been a hot debate among educational issues these days in Vietnam. In the context of modernization and industrialization, Vietnamese higher educational system has expressed its shortcomings, especially in meeting the demand of labor market particularly and human resources generally. Many reasons explain the situation but it seems that the most frequently cited one is the concern about the poor curricula and teaching. The low quality of curricula, teaching, learning and research has resulted in low quality of graduates labor force, mismatch of the graduate supply and demand of labor market, proved by high unemployment rate of college and university graduates while employers find many difficulties in recruiting graduates that meet their expectation and work requirements.

Many initiatives have been introduced to increase the coherence, flexibility and responsiveness of higher education to the changing demands of society and the market economy. One of the most frequently discussed is the campaign launched by the Ministry of Education and Training of improving curricula, contents, teaching, learning and higher education research quality in early 2000. Besides this campaign, numerous policy proposals have been given out, including the establishment of frame curricula for each group of training field, the “import” of foreign updated teaching syllabus... However, there have been many critics about the infeasibility, ambiguousness of this campaign and its accompanying initiatives. Stemming from that, the tentative thesis will try to make clear of this policy. Questions that the study would try to answer are: What are

backgrounds of the policy of improving higher educational curricula, teaching and learning towards connecting the needs of labor market? Can that policy act as a main impetus for upgrading the quality of graduate labor force? What are obstacles in implementing this policy? And what are solutions to enhance the effectiveness of the policy in terms of matching the demand of labor market?

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **The disconnect of curricula and teaching in Vietnamese higher education with the labor market**

#### **1.1 Higher education curricula and teaching methods**

Information about Vietnamese higher education system would act as background to understand the dilemma of higher education curricula, teaching and learning and motivations for reform.

#### **Tertiary education in Vietnam**

In years past, higher education in Vietnam had been similar to that of the former Soviet Union with a multiplicity of small mono-disciplinary institutions with limited linkage between teaching and research. The present structures and procedures have been inherited from the era of central planning when higher education was segmented by economic sectors with many specialized institutions, each with little autonomy of its own, reporting to a particular line ministry.

#### **Types of universities and colleges**

Higher education in Vietnam means " dai hoc va cao dang" or "universities and colleges (or junior colleges) ". Study programs are of four to six years at universities while they are of three years in colleges. There are three broad types of universities in Vietnam; two of which are more traditional forms meaning that they rely on classroom lectures as their principal medium of instruction. The first of this type are the "specialized universities,"



each of which focuses on a single area of study, such as economics, engineering, fine arts, or law. The second of this type are the “multi-disciplinary universities,” including five newly established national and regional universities in some of Vietnam’s largest cities. The third and newest category of university education in Vietnam is the “open university” system in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. There are more than 200 universities and colleges in Vietnam educating approximately 1,000,000 students at any given time. This figure includes a number of junior colleges, but excludes institutions under the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The junior college sector now consists of teachers' colleges and technical and vocational and training colleges offering courses in areas such as agriculture, allied health, fine arts, banking, and policy studies.

### **Two-phase education system**

- *General Education:* A two-tier degree program was introduced in 1988 whereby the first three to four semesters of study constitute the general stage of core curriculum, preparing students for more specialized studies during the second phase. In the first phase, often referred to as general education, students take general subjects such as humanities, arts, and science. There are seven core groupings: social sciences, humanities, foreign languages, business and management, economics, mathematics and physics, biology, and chemistry. Completion of the first phase (or the first somehow 90 credits) leads to the award of a Certificate of University Studies which determines eligibility to take the selection examinations for admission to phase two, or the specialized education component. At the end of the general education program, a student’s status and scholarship are reviewed. It is also possible for students to change universities at this

stage, but in practice this is restricted due to the nature of the core studies program and its availability at another university.

- *Specialized Education*: During the second phase, students take more specialized studies in one or two areas. Programs are based on the list of specialties issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and comprise about 34 groups and 127 disciplines. This phase concludes with a graduation thesis or project or with comprehensive exams. Formerly, the thesis option was restricted to the best students, but now may be considered as a major equivalent of credits. Not all institutions have adopted the two-phase system, but the universities under complete MOET control have done so.

### **Features of curricula in Vietnamese higher education system**

Year-based curricula is the main feature of Vietnamese higher educational system whereby classes are organized with same courses for all students. Students have to take courses as granted. That means each course is core and mandatory and the curricula is fixed for each year. Students can't have options of courses.

In higher education, countries in region and worldwide has obtained profound development. In terms of content, there has been a move to concentrate on "learning skills" and "social capacity" while in Vietnam, the approach of "professional skills" is still popular. Education and training methods in the world now emphasize "problem-based learning" and "learning communities" but in Vietnam it is the way of "illustrative teaching" and high rate of students/teacher: from 25/1 to 30/1 (as shown in table below).

<Table 2-1-1> Number of students and teachers

	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Students	893,754	918,228	974,119	1,020,667	1,032,440
Teachers	30,309	32,205	35,938	38,608	39,985
Student/teacher	29/1	28/1	27/1	26/1	25/1

Source: Ministry of Education and Training

Majority of HEIs in Vietnam are still applying the content approach in curricula. This approach considers education is the process of knowledge transference from teachers to students. Therefore, students are taught of knowledge. With the fast development of science and technology nowadays, this way of training together with fixed regular curricula weigh on students with overloaded but quick-to-be-outdated knowledge.

### **Teaching and learning practice in Vietnam higher education**

One of main reasons for low quality of higher education output is the outdated teaching and learning methods. Majority of teaching staff use traditional teaching method. This way of teaching just concentrates on transferring students the content of courses or text books, expecting them to understand and remember what are written in lectures. That's why students are often familiar with passive listening, taking note and trying to memorize

what have been heard. They have few opportunities to think critically and analytically what are taught.

"Overloaded curricula with theories and useless knowledge, theory doesn't go together with practical training, classical teaching methods (mainly based on memorization)" are often said by graduates while arguing for their passiveness in learning and hence in working. Little attention is paid to the application of learned knowledge and skills in daily life and production. Learning habit of memorization is popular among students so that practical knowledge and creativity are not enabled to develop. Furthermore, methodologies used in pedagogical colleges and universities can't produce teachers of active skills and teaching creativity.

## 1.2 The disconnect with the labor market

Stiff curricula, outdated teaching has resulted in producing a great number of college and university graduates that enter labor market with passive attitude, possess reluctance or don't know how to express their own ideas. Their creativeness is not up to expectation of employers and requirements of work since it has not been facilitated by long-lasting teaching practice at university.

Thus, mismatch between higher education output and the need of labor market can be seen through graduate labor performance and employers' challenges in seeking for human resources. Under current economic conditions, the main problem facing employers in Vietnam is not also a lack of skilled labor (who are persons that possess graduation form colleges and universities) but also a shortage of good quality skilled labor. There is a demand of 500,000 graduates in labor market each year while the total supply is just around 140,000<sup>1</sup>.

<Table 2-2-3> Number of higher education institutions and graduates 1999-2004

	1999-2000	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Institution	153	178	191	202	214
College	84	104	114	121	127
Graduates	30,902	45,757	4,7133	50,197	55,562
University	69	74	77	81	87
Graduates	90,791	117,353	121,804	113,763	110,110

Source: MOET

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics on labor and employment (1996-2003) - Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs.

### **Graduates status in labor market**

Analysis of labor statistics and graduate surveys indicate high unemployment rate for university graduates : over 23% .

<Table 2-2-1> Graduate employment rate

	Employed	Unemployed	Further study
1996	71.61%	28.39%	4.85%
1999	72.47	23.8%	3.69%
2001	70.8%	24.53%	4.67%

<Table 2-2-2> Graduates employed by weekly wage hours

	<17hs	17hs-32hs	33hs-40hs	41hs-48hs	48hs
Proportion of employed	9,31%	12,59%	35,75%	31,88%	10.47 %

Source: Graduate Tracer Survey, 1999-2001, Reports on results and recommendations,

Vietnam higher education project; Hanoi -2001

### **Employers' views about graduate labor quality**

Evaluation of the quality of university graduates is based mainly on a series of questions put to major employers of Vietnamese graduates. These questions asked employers to

assess graduates' level of preparation and performance on the job, the time spent to refresh and retrain graduates to be able to do the job

The messages from the managers of surveyed firms are of common features: (a) graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job; (b) Graduates are not creative enough, short of basic skills such as those of communications, presentation, team-work, discussion for problem-solving. Employers often complain about insufficient academic preparation as showed in many graduate employment performance surveys. For example, Statistics of Quang Trung Software Park in Ho Chi Minh City shows that: among 1230 (out of 3390) IT graduates surveyed in September 2001, 46% lack professional knowledge while another 42% have no skills for working in a group setting. 41% of interviewed students are in need of presentation skills and 28% find little self-confidence. English fluency is considered as one important work requirement but is a weakness of these IT graduates as 45% of them can not use English as a tool of job<sup>2</sup>. Some joint reports on Graduate Performance in Labor Market by the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs still show gloomy situation and future for graduates employment: long time to seek jobs, low wage, quick turnover, extra costs for learning and improving skills that should have been taught at universities and colleges.

A survey by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry conducted with its 150 out of 1500 member enterprises in three biggest cities (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang) on costs related to employment of graduates in July 2001 illustrated the above mentioned fact. 65% of the employers spent around eight months to re-train the graduate employees

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<sup>2</sup> Source: IT Graduate Tracer Survey in Ho Chi Minh City - Project funded by Japan International Cooperation Agency and Ho Chi Minh City Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs- 2001.

with basic working skills but not professional ones while the preferable probation is of three to six months. Cost of re-training decreases starting salary and slow promotion that makes graduate employees discouraged. 47% of the enterprises offered fresh graduates the rate of 1,200,000 VND per month for starting year which made up only 80% of average spending per capita in those cities<sup>3</sup>.

All the facts indicate a number of challenges along the way faced by Vietnam higher education in producing quality graduate force for labor market. There has been widespread criticism of a system that is still too Soviet in approach and unwilling to loosen centralized control to allow for competition between the private and State sectors. In particular many commentators have expressed the concern that outdated knowledge and "ivory tower" curricula repeatedly stifle creative thinking and fail to produce students who can apply academic knowledge to real life situations. Nonetheless, the acknowledgement and focus on these issues suggests that MOET is positioning itself to analyze the situation and move toward workable solutions.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: Living Standards in 20 cities in Vietnam 1999-2001 - Vietnam General Office of Statistics.



## CHAPTER 2

### **Campaign of improving curricula and teaching in colleges and universities**

#### **2.1. How is the campaign?**

Concerning about the disconnect between higher education curricula, teaching and learning and the demand of labor market and the country's development, there have been increasing calls for eliminating differentiated curricula tracks and sorting practices, and for giving all students an opportunity to take work-prep courses.

As described in Development Strategy for Education 2001-1010<sup>4</sup>, the objective of higher education for 2001-2010 are : "to meet demands in high qualified human resources development, responsive to economics-social structure in the era of industrialization, modernization, promoting competitiveness and equity cooperation in the integration into global economy process. Facilitating expansion of postsecondary education would be done through diversification of training programs based on a developed transferring system, responsive to degree level structure, employment, geographical and regional structure of human resources, matched with HEIs capacity. Responsiveness to labors market in the society, and capacity to self- employment and creating employment for others would be increased". The Strategy also worked out that to attain this objective, HE policy could pay much attention on strong renovations as: production of human resources with high level, with competitiveness and cooperation capacity, responsiveness and self – employment; extended system of HE could be built in the light of postsecondary

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<sup>4</sup> Development Strategy on education period 2001-2010 approved by Prime Minister (December 2001)

education, diversification and standardization for each type of degree, training program, fit in the structure, connection each with other and with employment market, toward institutional capacity building. Some direction, new or strong, as stated here, would be paid sufficiently and in priority in HE policy. As to this objective, there should be a system of alternatives whose design and operation are relied upon the clearly and precisely defined mission and functions of higher education. Thereupon, it will be of great assistance and advantage for execution of decided targeted alternatives. The three functions, born of, and integral to higher education – education, researching, and public servicing – should be more specified and more expanded, addressing actively to three areas of development of human resource, science – technology, and socio-economy.

Quality policy is the policy underlying other policies regarding to quality assurance of education and training output. Quality policy is based on a new view, in which, quality is diversified, standardized and modernized for each to program, content, connection capacity and transformation amongst for different modes of education...; self-study and lifelong learning developed; focused IT skills, foreign languages and communication as “three global skills” strengthened.

Based on the Strategy, the National Commission on the Higher Education - Ministry of Education and Training - in its Circular on 22/01/2000 to colleges and universities launched a campaign to renovate curricula, teaching and learning methods in higher education institutions. As far as curricula concerned, the commission called HEIs to move forward, piloting their own initiatives to improve education and training curricula. It also recommended merging the best elements of the academic and vocational tracks into one core curricula that students recognize as having relevance and practical value to

their lives and future jobs. It emphasized that all HE programs should incorporate the key skills of communication, information technology (IT), numeracy and learning how to learn.

The overall goals of the country's higher education reform were to improve the quality and effectiveness of education in order to meet the diversified demand for human resources. Reform would focus on renovating educational content, methodologies and curricula, and increasing the quality of professors. Meanwhile, methods of learning and teaching must be improved further so as to encourage students' creativity through self study and group discussions.

### **Curricula reform proposals**

A Decision made by the Minister of Education and Training on 30/07/2000 put into effect the "Piloting the education and training, evaluation and degree grant in some colleges and universities by credit-based management mechanism" Credit-based educational system is piloted in some HEIs. The curricula is of diverse design with core and elective courses that can fit various conditions, needs and capacity of students. It allows students get degrees through a process of actively accumulating knowledge from different sources.

Higher education courses are expected to provide opportunities for students to improve and practice a range of key skills in the areas:

- Communication: for example, taking part in discussions and making presentations; reading and responding to written material; producing written material.

- Application of number, e.g., collecting and recording data; working with data; presenting findings.
- Information technology, for instance, preparing information; processing and presenting information; reviewing the use of information technology.
- Working with others, for example, planning activities, working towards identified targets.
- Improving own learning and performance, for example, setting targets and action planning; following plans to meet targets.

Many other curricula initiatives have been called for. The following are those cited in the decision as the most advocated, discussed and pursued.

- Problem-solving abilities

First of all, general skills are frequently called for more specifically. Graduates are expected to have acquired "problem-solving abilities" or "key qualifications". This thrust is based on the concern that general knowledge and general competencies are not necessarily applicable to the world of work. Rather, graduates have to find ways of transferring these competencies from the world of learning to the world of work.

- Orientation towards practice

Secondly, fostering the ability to transfer knowledge from the world of learning, science and scholarship to the world of professional work is widely viewed as an increasingly important task of HE which can not be met simply by fostering relatively general strategies of problem-solving or relatively general "key " competencies. It is often suggested that curriculum, teaching and learning should be more applied in nature or

more practice-oriented in various ways. Advocating this approach of teaching and learning, internships and other practical phases in the course of study, as well as the involvement of practitioners in teaching and various other specific activities and measures are expected to serve this aim.

### **Teaching and learning methods and educational management**

Utilize modern teaching methods in which students are the centre of the teaching process. The teaching should promote student's creativity, self-motivation, practical capacity and application, team-work ability and other professional skills. Furthermore, students are enabled to do research, practice problem-based methods, case study

Reforming teaching methods is towards effective teaching and learning in which or students are the centre of teaching process. Therefore, the "understanding" of students is the main measurement of the effectiveness of teaching. Also, interaction between teachers and students about their understanding of one issue is to evaluate the application of new teaching methods. There are 6 principles that teachers should bear in mind while applying a teaching method:

- Inspiring students with clear explanation
- Respecting students and their way of learning, making them confident of their ability to absorb knowledge.
- Frequently getting evaluation and feedback from students
- Pointing out objectives and challenges of learning for students

- Forging in students the capacity of self-study, the search for their own ways of learning and self-testing.

- Learning about students to give them correspondent guidelines or instructions.

With the objective approach, training goals are specified in learning outcome or the concentration on educational output. Students are required to foster their skills and capacity gradually with the process of learning including their knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Shortly, the campaign has worked out a frame of reform in which HEIs are encouraged, not abided, to change their old practice of education and training through renovating curricula and teaching. As seen in its policy, the MOET just launched the campaign with guidelines and expected results. No roadmap and specific solutions were given out. That's why there have been many critics about the infeasibility, ambiguousness of this campaign. Over the past four years of its implementation, some promising initiatives have been put into practice but it can be seen the mismatch of that clear desire to change and vague path to make changes visible.

## **2.2 The implementation of the campaign**

### **Some effective initiatives**

The policy is toward a more explicit link between what students learn in the classroom and what they might be doing when they enter the labor market. In other words, the vocationalizing of the HE curriculum has been extended an reinterpreted form the relatively narrow base of conventional vocational and professional courses to a much broader concern with explicit connections an relevance to work. This trend is located within a government orientation to develop "more flexible patterns of teaching and learning". Objectives of the policy are: To create closer links between HEIs and work; to help providers of education and training to develop processes which will enable individuals to take more control of their learning and working careers; To ensure that qualifications are relevant to the needs of the individual.

This generally means a move away from project-based work for external clients to restructuring taught courses in such a way as to incorporate different, or a greater variety of, teaching methods which would encourage students to develop the "personal transferable skills". So the emphasis on improving teaching methods can be put simply that "it is not about what you are teaching - its about how you are teaching it". Many departments moved towards a greater focus on group project work - thus providing opportunities for students to experience and rehearse the team-working that is a fairly common working practice in many industrial and commercial settings. The requirement that students submit individual coursework assignments in written form was eased to allow students to give oral presentations of work completed - often as part of a group.

This provided opportunities to develop better presentation skills - which would be useful, if not essential - in most employment contexts.

A number of HEIs were involved in key skills activities - either as part of the campaign or as part of institutional policies. Other approaches to key skills were: the integration of key skills within subject studies; adding key skills-related activities to subject studies; or providing optional courses or modules in various key skills. Some examples of these activities are:

- An effective learning program that offers various one-off sessions on such topics as revision skills, giving presentations, report writing, working in teams, is run on a voluntary basis by a small core team of staff for any students within the university who wish to attend. The program has been running at the University of National Economics, College of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University - Hanoi)
- An "IT for all" program in some colleges of teaching, agriculture, social sciences and humanities.
- English courses that focus on speaking and listening at work, not only general English or concentration on grammar and structure

Also, new models of reform in some higher education institutes show encouraging signals. Two prominent examples are: project-based training at HCMC college for Technology and Industrial management and balanced curriculum of Da Nang technology college in training senior technicians in fields of electronics, electronic engineering, computer science, mechanics, dynamics, construction and civil engineering. Generally, courses of political sciences account for less than 10 % of curricula, reserving room for



other courses on basic science and techniques, communications (computer skills, foreign languages...) and practice.

### **Obstacles and critics**

These training models are not rare but unable to show a still common phenomena of higher education institutes in which graduate output quality is not up to the mark due to theory-loaded curriculum, outdated and inadequate equipment, limited connection with labor market, unqualified teaching staff.

Many HEIs are trying to replace the year-based curricula with the credit-based one. However, due to the fact that classes are organized for each enrollment year, it is difficult for students to have their private academic plans. It is also because:

- Teaching and learning conditions are not up to the mark due to the lack of textbooks, reference materials, library sources...
- HEIs are of narrow disciplines, small scale and number of teaching staff, which makes it impossible to create elective courses for students.
- A great number of teaching staff and management are not graduates from universities of credit-based system.

It is a common practice curriculum reform at Vietnamese colleges and universities that structure of curricula is "redesigned" to match new goals of training but not "changed" by adding new and suitable courses responding to labor market signals. The fact of without or lack of teaching and learning tools and equipment and incompetence of teaching persons make practical training for students little. Teacher's vague sense of devotion plus

low wages discourage them to improve their way of teaching. Education, training and evaluation methods are still determined by exams and issuance of professional certificates. Debates on changing the way of evaluation of education and training are just words since the most of universities and colleges still are not allowed to make that change by their owns.

Managers and teaching staff in colleges and universities often pay profound attention to debates and initiatives to renovate content and teaching methods. However, most of them haven't been able to have a deeply critical insights of these reforms in terms of results and consequences. They find it confusing to work out a clear direction for reform of curricula and teaching at their institutes. That's why the policy has been criticized of its vagueness, again still theories and without specific solutions.

Since its start, there have been no comprehensive evaluations of curricula changes in universities and colleges, especially the improvement of teaching and learning. Many workshops and debates among relevant persons just have moved around theories with no concrete strategies due to the lack of resources for higher education institutions. Furthermore, it's also the "habit" and "mindset" of some education managers, teachers and even students that are reluctant to think and change. Most of all, due to the campaign's nature of "piloting", the Ministry of Education and Training has been reluctant to grant more autonomy to universities and colleges to act as they wish. The irony is that it still asks these institutions to move forward but be in the lock of unchanged frame curricula for each field of training.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Some suggestions for improvements**

Despite its modest results, the campaign of improving curricula, teaching and learning at higher education institutions has inspired colleges and universities to upgrade themselves to produce skilled and adaptive labor force for the evolving market. For the "improvement" of the policy of renovation the quality of higher education, some suggestions are:

#### **3.1 Curricula change and development**

Each type of higher education institutes should initiate reform of curricula corresponding to their nature:

- i) For some colleges: the notion of "comprehensive schools" may be suitable for reform. It means the parallel vocational training and general knowledge education or combination of two programs in what is well-known model of "community college".
- ii) For colleges and universities of Social Sciences and Humanities: courses should be practical, serving specific socio-economic or other issues or workplaces that need students in the future. For example: As a developing country in the era of globalization and international integration, studies of globalization and poverty, public policy, international economics should be put more attention and investment.
- iii) For technical colleges: curriculum in sciences and technologies should be changed and supplemented to meet urgent needs of some provinces. That requires the cooperation

of the colleges with provincial authorities, labor-related agencies and enterprises to produce specialized labor for the local development.

iv) For polytechnique, engineering universities and science and technology faculties in universities: positive teaching method should be developed; program or project-based working style should be formed gradually in students; theories and practice should come together in laboratories or workshops.

v) For pedagogical universities: application of games can bring some results.

Applied in many countries ( Japan, South Korea, Singapore), "Project-based approach" seems effective in improving curricula and teaching methods. It requires a thorough reform whereby the approach of "learning science and techniques" ( which emphasizes theory) should be replaced by that of "teaching science and techniques" which concentrates on obtaining knowledge and skills by practice.

In order to strengthen the connections between HE output - graduate supply - and the world of work - labor market demand, the following means of curricula changes are most frequently mentioned and should be further applied:

- Involvement of practitioners in curriculum development
- Participation of industry in decision-making processes, for example through membership on boards or advisory councils;
- Mobility between academic and professional careers as well as part-time teaching by practitioners;
- Internships for students prior to or during the course of study;
- Involvement of students in research projects sponsored by enterprises and industries;

- Provision of vocational counseling services for students and placement of graduates.

### **Emphasis placed on general skills and flexibility**

In Vietnam's developing conditions, with the strategy of "short cut and be headed up", there is acknowledgement of flexibility of higher education in producing graduate output for labor market. That means a close attention should be paid to the demand for generic competencies, social skills, personality development, problem-solving skills, information-technology skills and lifelong-learning skills.

There are several reasons for growing emphasis on general competencies, social skills and personality. Firstly, it is generally recognized that specialized professional knowledge is now becoming obsolete quickly than in the past. This is one of the major reasons why life-long learning and life-long professional education is generally considered to be gaining importance. Secondly, a growing number of professions and of positions within public and private sectors is not clearly demarcated but rather based on knowledge deriving from different disciplines. It seems to be more difficult for HE curricula to fix and prepare specifically. Thirdly, mass education access to higher education, employment problems in general as well as dynamic changes in the economy are likely to elicit mismatches between the skills of graduates and the demands of the employment system. Flexible and generally educated persons are expected to be less disappointed about the mismatches and to adapt more easily to job tasks which are not anticipated in advance. It is more the case in Vietnam when the lack of resources and weak macro-economic management have made it tricky to build up comprehensive and

reliable reports and forecasts of labor market demand and supply, especially those for graduate labor force.

### **3.2 Renovation of teaching and learning**

Curricula reform seeks to enhance the quality of teaching since curricula and teaching are greatly interlocked and directly influence higher education quality and graduate competencies in labor market. It has been widely recognized that it's time to build specific plan, program for pushing up the renovation of teaching in higher education institutes. The improvement should be made by both teachers and students. Moreover, higher educational authorities should demonstrate their clear opinion and commitment by management mechanism and legal framework rather than words of advocacy and campaign. Reforming HE teaching is the task of not only the Ministry of Education and Training but also that of all society. The involvement of other sectors and agencies would contribute favorable conditions such as educational facilities, incentive policies for those of stakes, especially teachers. Changing teaching methods would be utopian if teachers were still paid low wage, not supported by modern teaching tools and equipment.

The application of IT, modern teaching facilities is essential to upgrade the process of teaching. Thus, the role of teachers should be redefined in the Law of Education and more important , in mind of teachers. Teachers are now supposed to be not only "teaching" but also "guiding" students. Utilization of teaching assistants can be a good way to reduce work load of teachers and help them to interact with students and learn more about what students need. A competitive mechanism among teachers should be set

up by student evaluation of teaching. The mechanism will boost teachers to continuously upgrade themselves for effective teaching and learning.

In short, all reform in curricula, teaching and learning should result in helping students improve their social and communicative skills, understand the trends and needs the labor market and graduate work, address the tensions between academic approaches and professional problem solving and reinforce students' understanding of the social conditions of work and career and thus strengthen their potential for taking opportunities of employment.

## **CONCLUSIVE REMARKS**

Considered a major priority as part of a larger education plan for 2020, Vietnam intends to build a modern system of higher education capable of satisfying the needs of the new economy. This will require a coordinated effort in several different areas including better quality control, new curricula, improved teaching techniques and staffing, increased financing from a number of sources. Campaign of improving curricula, teaching in colleges and universities launched by the Ministry of Education and Training since early 2000 is one of the steps of the plan, responding to a common concern and critics of the disconnect of higher education and the world of work. The campaign has reflected the increasing pressure to upgrade and modify the quality of teacher training, teaching, and curricula to produce graduates with skills needed in the evolving labor market. Encouraged by the campaign, colleges and universities have moved forward with creative solutions. Still, improvement in curricula, teaching for higher quality of graduate labor force has been vague due to the lack of resources of higher education institutions, inflexible educational management mechanism.

Renovating curricula, teaching and learning in higher education is a long process that need comprehensive solutions. Over the past four years, that campaign of the Ministry of Education and Training can be considered as a "piloting period" that should have an end for the real start in large scale. Comprehensive sum-up and evaluation should be conducted by MOET to draw lessons and work out next steps.



Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Training should further consolidate the existing college and university network while constructing colleges and universities with higher training quality and better facilities. However, it should focus on macro-management and give real autonomy to higher education institutions. Fair competition among public and private colleges and universities, strong autonomy and social responsibility granted and taken by higher education institutions would be the most important motivations for them in producing skilled labor that meet the demand of labor market particularly and human resources generally.

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