

Chapter 9

The Development of Community Colleges in Vietnam

Anh Le

University of Nebraska – Lincoln, USA

ABSTRACT

Since 1986, with the creation of the Renovation (Doi moi) policy, Vietnam has demonstrated a strong commitment to the improvement of its higher education system. After 25 years of opening its doors to the global educational environment, Vietnam has achieved some notable accomplishments. The country's higher educational system has become more diversified, more accessible, and more open to international cooperation. However, the management structure and quality assurance aspects of higher education still need significant improvement. One of the new and exciting opportunities for Vietnamese higher education is the development of community colleges. The emergence of community colleges, which resemble the U.S. community college model, is a fairly new phenomenon in Vietnam. This chapter analyzes the literature and the Vietnamese government's policies regarding the direction of higher education in general and community colleges in particular. Predictions and recommendations for the future of Vietnamese community colleges are also provided.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1986, with the creation of the Renovation (*Doi moi*) policy, Vietnam has demonstrated a strong commitment to the improvement of its higher education system. After 30 years of opening its doors to the global educational environment, Vietnam has achieved some notable accomplishments. The country's higher educational system has become more diversified, more accessible, and more open to international cooperation. However, the management structure and quality assurance aspects of higher education still need significant improvement. One of the new and exciting opportunities for Vietnamese higher education is the development of community colleges. Even though colleges have long been a big part of the Vietnamese higher education system, most of them are specialized technical or vocational colleges. The emergence of community colleges, which resemble the U.S. community college model, is a fairly new phenomenon in Vietnam.

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THE HIGHER EDUCATION SITUATION IN VIETNAM

According to the 2012 World Bank report on Vietnam's educational development, the 1986 reform orientation for higher education emphasized new goals and structural changes in the sector (World Bank, 2012). Training was provided for various economic components and to meet the diverse learning needs of the society. Instead of reliance on the state budget, all possible financial sources were to be mobilized and used. Instead of implementing only the planned targets set by the state, other non-state targets were also set and fulfilled. Instead of rigid training programs, various flexible and diverse training programs were developed to meet the requirements of employment creation and finding a job in a new market economy with many job-related changes.

One significant structural change was the merging of the various agencies into one agency that had sole authority and is responsible for the entire educational system. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) was established in 1990 from the merger of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher, Technical, and Vocational Education. The MOET has since been the main authority responsible for the national education system, which includes all levels from preschool to postgraduate programs (Ngo, 2006). In 1998, the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids, and Social Affairs assumed responsibility for vocational and technical education. The MOET controls most of the essential components of higher education, including the allocation of state funding and the setting of the curriculum. All academic matters are regulated by the MOET. Despite the MOET's significant power over higher education, other agencies are also involved. For example, universities of medicine and pharmacy are controlled by the Ministry of Health.

Based on training levels, higher education in Vietnam includes college education, university education, master's education, and doctoral education. College education offers training programs that are 1.5 to 3 years of study in duration. Colleges can offer less than baccalaureate training programs, whereas universities offer bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs. Research Institutes can offer doctoral programs and in cooperation with universities can offer master's programs as permitted by the prime minister (Higher Education Department, 2006). According to the General Statistics Office website (2012), in the 2011–2012 academic year there were 215 colleges and 204 universities in Vietnam. The total enrollment in higher education was 2,204,313, with 756,292 students enrolled in colleges and 1,448,021 students enrolled in universities.

Obtaining access to higher education in Vietnam can be very difficult because the demand outpaces the capacity of colleges and universities. Only a small percentage of those who pass the national entrance exam will be considered for matriculation. The difficulty in accessing higher education contributes to the persistence of inequalities in Vietnamese society. For example, London (2004) pointed out that in 1998, 18- to 23-year-old students from the wealthiest quintile were 61 times more likely to be enrolled than those from the poorest quintile.

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