Blurring boundaries between higher education and vocational education: The cases of Japan and Vietnam

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Presentation flow

1. Introduction
2. Japan’s case
3. Vietnam’s case
4. Conclusions
1. Introduction: Global trends of vocational education in HE

- US: Community colleges
- Germany: Fachhochschule (1968)
- Finland: AMK (vocational HEI) (1996)
- Korea: Professional universities (1979)
- Australia: AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework)

2-1. Japan: Higher education institutions

- Universities (781)
  - Supervised and subsidized by MEXT
  - Liberal arts education and academic specialized education
- Junior colleges (JCs) (352)
  - Supervised and subsidized by MEXT
  - Liberal arts and specialized education with an associate degree
- Colleges of technology (CT) (57)
  - Supervised and subsidized by MEXT
  - 5-year program with an associate degree
- Professional training colleges (PTCs) (2,814)
  - Supervised and subsidized by local governments
  - Practical skills development for specific jobs
2-2. Japan: Recent trends

- Increasing rate of admission into higher education institutions: around 80% of high school graduates are enrolled (52% to universities, 5% to JCs, 23% to PTCs)
- “Mismatch” between university education and professions/jobs—High rate of unemployment (6.3% in 2014 against overall 3.6%) and high rate of job-quitting within 3-year work experience (30-40%)
- Societal preference to academic programs over vocational programs
- Increasing attention to “competencies development” in university education
2-3. Japan: Recent trends

- Universities increasingly emphasize skills development, while maintaining liberal education
- PTCs are moving towards offering bachelor and master’s degrees
- Factors such as:
  - lower birth rate
  - shrinking and ageing population
  - downward trend in corporate in-house training budget
  - increasing demand for workers with specific skills and high skills
- Changes in industrial structure and job market, diversification of professions
2-4. Japan: Recent trends

- Universities/JCs: Ambiguous status of vocational education in their programs
- PTCs: Issue of quality in vocational education
- “Double schooling”:
  - University student/graduate attends a PTC for a professional certificate
  - PTC student/graduate enrolls in a university for a bachelor degree
- Demands from PTCs to allow them to establish a new vocational university with a funding from MEXT
2-5. Japan: Recent developments in vocational education in HE

- 2003: Establishment of new type of professional graduate schools (専門職大学院) (law, teacher training, business/MOT, accounting, intellectual property, etc.) (122 schools)
- 2011: Required incorporation of professional and career education at all universities and JCs
- 2013: MEXT encourages universities to promote internships
- 2015: MEXT-certified professional special program (職業実践専門課程) at PTCs which are under supervision of local governments (873 programs)
- 2016: MEXT’s proposal to create “professional vocational university (PVU)” (専門職業大学) and “professional vocational JC” in 2019 [first time in the last 50 years to add a new category of university]
### 2-6. Japan: Mapping out higher education institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of institution</th>
<th>Vocational orientation</th>
<th>Academic orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills as foundations</td>
<td>Vocationally-oriented</td>
<td>Academically-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education contents</td>
<td>Skills-centered</td>
<td>Knowledge-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education methods</td>
<td>Practical and experiential</td>
<td>Theoretical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competencies emphasized</td>
<td>Practical competencies</td>
<td>Analytical and critical competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional vocational university (newly proposed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>junior colleges</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>colleges of technology</td>
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<td>professional training colleges</td>
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2-7: PVU: Rationales

- Aim at producing “ready-to-work” human resources in the fields such as IT, tourism, agriculture, cooking.
- Emphasis on practical vocational education taught by predominantly practitioner faculty with internship more than 600 hours in total for a 4-year bachelor program.
- Competencies to be acquired:
  - High level professional knowledge for specific jobs/positions
  - Excellent skills for specific jobs/positions
  - Knowledge and skills specific for each field
  - Comprehensive competency to link theory and practice
2-8. PVU: Issues

- Redundancy and competition with traditional universities and JCs (law school experience)
- Would business and industry recognize PVU in the same way as traditional universities?
- Really meeting the needs of students?-Do they really want to spend 4 years, instead of 2-3 years, to be a beautician?
- Skills development: More effective before or after entering workforce?
2-9. PVU: Issues

- Weak relationship between university majors and the actual field of work in Japan. Degrees/qualifications not so important, which makes OJT crucial in Japan.
- OJT can respond better to changing industrial structure and job market than vocation education which has higher opportunity cost.
- Vocationally-oriented competencies hard to be transferrable.
- Liberal arts serves as a foundation for professional and vocational university education.
3-1. Vietnam: Recent developments in HE

- Increasing rate of university admissions
- Increasing number of universities and their deteriorating quality (e.g., shortage of qualified lecturers)
- 433 universities/JCs (347 state-owned and 86 non-state-owned)
  - 49 JCs upgraded to a university status
  - 59 intermediate schools upgraded to a JC status (2-year)
3-2. Vietnam: Recent developments in HE

- Local authorities interested in establishing universities which can attract more students
- School leaders interested in upgrading their schools to gain a higher status and prestige and to attract more students for profit
- Strong needs for university and JCs from the society
- Reduced study time from 4-6 years to 3-4 years by reducing theoretical education and increasing practical education (+ alignment with ASEAN standard)
3-3. Vietnam: Recent developments in HE

- Higher rate of unemployment of higher education degree holders: 6.9% against the 1.97% of non-degree group
- 162,000 bachelor degree holders unemployed as of mid-2014
- 178,000 bachelor and master’s degree holders unemployed in the 1st quarter in 2015 (16,000 rise from 2014)
- 225,500 bachelor and master’s degree holders unemployed in the 4th quarter in 2015

Why?
3-4. Vietnam: Issues

- “Mismatch” between higher education and needed knowledge and skills at work
  - Skills shortage: scarcity of workers in some occupations
  - Skills gap: inadequate skills of job applicants
- Universities
  - Traditional emphasis on theoretical education
  - Rote learning, memorization, reproduction
  - Lecture dominance and lack of active learning
  - Weak guidance system for job placement
3-5. Vietnam: Issues

- Industry
  - High pace of economic growth
  - Structural change: Reallocation of jobs away from agriculture (from low productivity farming to higher productivity non-farming jobs)
  - Structural problems in banking sectors highlighted productivity as more sustainable venue than capital investment
  - Shift of necessary skills due to the transition from a centrally planned economy to *doi moi*-based market economy, leading to global integration
  - From the value of loyalty and obedience to the value of being independent and innovative
3-6. Vietnam: Issues

- Students and business sector claim that universities do not offer opportunities to develop their skills

- Responses from HEIs
  - Universities began offering vocational courses within their curriculum to increase the employability of graduates
  - Vocational HEIs upgrading into university status
  - Gradual shift from teacher-centered to student-centered education
4-1. Conclusions: Higher education for sustainability

- University vs. TVET in Japan and Vietnam
  - Prestige vs. reality ⇒ Converging
  - Missions of university, JCs, professional/vocational schools
  - Division of labor or all institutions do all?
  - Type or category of institution matter?
  - Competition for student recruitment for institutional survival, and government subsidy
  - Ensuring opportunities for students to be mobile between academic track and vocational track (e.g., dual system in Germany)
  - Greater autonomy with accountability at HEIs to respond quickly and independently to changes in society and industry
4-2. Conclusions: Higher education for sustainability

- Beyond “mismatch” between university and work
  - Any other missing links?: Japan, Vietnam
  - “Ready-to-work” graduates feasible and realistic in fast changing economy?
- Skills considered important for sustainable economy and development
  - “Soft skills” or “life skills”: language, communication, teamwork, leadership, independent planning, presentation, decision-making, problem solving, etc.
  - Technical skills built on cognitive and behavioral skills
Main references

- Japan
  - Government documents
- Vietnam
  - Reports by World Bank and other donors