

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
- UK: New universities (post-1992 universities) (1992)
- Germany: Fachhochschule (1968)
- Finland: AMK (vocational HEI) (1996)
- Korea: Professional universities (1979)
- Australia: AQF (Australian Qualifications Framework)

- Europe: EQF (European Qualifications Framework), Bologna Process (1999) & Copenhagen Process (2002)

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

	Vocational orientation	Academic orientation
Knowledge and skills as foundations	Vocationally-oriented	Academically-oriented
Education contents	Skills-centered	Knowledge-centered
Education methods	Practical and experiential	Theoretical
Competencies emphasized	Practical competencies	Analytical and critical competencies
Types of institution	professional vocational university (newly proposed)	
	universities junior colleges colleges of technology professional training colleges	

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 \Rightarrow 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