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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

Dr. Hoang Dai Thang

Director, Admissions – Communications – Enterprise Cooperation Center
Viet Duc Industrial College — Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization and deep international integration, international cooperation in vocational education and training has become an inevitable trend. It contributes to improving training quality, meeting the demand for high-skilled human resources, and strengthening the linkage between schools and enterprises. This paper analyzes the theoretical foundations, current situation, and international cooperation models in vocational education and training in several countries, thereby identifying opportunities, challenges, and suggesting policy implications for Vietnam. The findings indicate that international cooperation not only enables vocational institutions to access advanced training technologies but also expands global employment opportunities for students.

KEYWORDS: vocational education and training, international cooperation, integration, high-quality human resources

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of international integration, a high-quality skilled workforce is considered the key to enhancing a nation's competitiveness. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, together with the increasing mobility of labour across borders, makes it impossible for countries to train human resources in isolation; instead, they are compelled to expand international cooperation in vocational education and training (VET).

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022), 75% of foreign direct investment (FDI) enterprises in the Asia-Pacific region regards vocational skills that meet international standards as a critical factor in recruitment. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, the report of the General Directorate of Vocational Education and Training (2023) indicates that:

- About 65% of vocational education institutions have engaged in international cooperation, but only 20% have implemented comprehensive training transfer programs.
- The proportion of students participating in international joint training programs remains below 5%.

- FDI enterprises often need to provide additional training for 6–12 months before employing workers.

These findings demonstrate that international cooperation is not merely a trend but an urgent requirement to improve the quality of vocational education and to integrate effectively into the global labour market.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

International cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) is understood as the process in which countries, training institutions, and international organizations collaborate to share resources, curricula, technologies, and teaching methodologies (OECD, 2022). Recent studies (Tran & Dinh, 2021; Smith, 2022) emphasize the role of international cooperation in standardizing vocational skills according to regional and global benchmarks.

Three common models include:

- Joint training programs leading to dual degrees.
- Training cooperation linked with foreign direct investment (FDI) enterprises.
- Transfer of curricula and occupational standards from international partners.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative research approach, combining the analysis of secondary documents (UNESCO, ILO, OECD, MOET, MOLISA, etc.) with case studies conducted in several countries, including Germany, Australia, South Korea, and Singapore. At the same time, the study is cross-referenced with the context of Vietnam using statistical data provided by the General Directorate of Vocational Education and Training (2023).

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. Current Situation in Vietnam

Vietnam has transferred 34 vocational training programs from Germany, Australia, and South Korea during the period 2017–2022 (MOLISA, 2023). Several colleges, such as Viet Duc Industrial College, Lilama 2 Technical & Technology College, and College of Technology II, are currently implementing training programs based on international curricula. However, such cooperation has mainly been concentrated in a limited number of key institutions and has not yet been widely expanded across the entire vocational education system.

Table 1. Selected statistics on international cooperation in vocational education and training in Vietnam (2017–2023)

Indicator	2017–2020	2021–2023	Total
Number of vocational training programs transferred	18	16	34
Number of vocational education and training (VET) institutions participating in international training	25	32	57
Percentage of students participating in international joint training programs	3,5%	4,8%	<5%
Percentage of students employed in FDI enterprises	65%	72%	~70%

Table 2. Comparison of International Cooperation Models in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Selected Countries

Country	Typical Model	Key Features	Employment Rate after Graduation
Germany	Dual System	70% at enterprises, 30% at schools	90–92%
Australia	TAFE System	International credit recognition	85–88%
South Korea	K-Move	Sending students for internships and work abroad	80–85%
Singapore	Global Cooperation	Partnerships with 300+ international partners	87–90%
Vietnam	Program transfer and FDI-linked training	Limited scale, concentrated in key institutions	65–72%

4.2. Opportunities and Challenges for Vietnam

4.2.1. Opportunities

4.2.1.1. Access to advanced training technologies

Through cooperation with Germany, Australia, South Korea, Japan, and others, Vietnamese vocational education and training (VET) institutions have the opportunity to transfer curricula and modern training equipment, enabling students to access learning methods that meet international standards.

4.2.1.2. Increased international employment opportunities

Students participating in joint programs gain advantages in foreign language proficiency, vocational skills, and international certificates, thereby expanding their opportunities to work in FDI enterprises or abroad.

4.2.1.3. Enhancement of institutional governance capacity

International cooperation creates favorable conditions for schools to learn from modern governance models, quality assurance systems, and international accreditation standards.

As a result, the reputation and competitiveness of Vietnamese VET institutions are significantly improved.

4.2.1.4. Development of teaching staff and experts

Through lecturer training programs, expert exchange, and international workshops, Vietnamese teachers can enhance their professional competence and pedagogical skills.

4.2.1.5. National integration and enhanced international standing

International cooperation in VET not only contributes to improving human resource quality but also affirms Vietnam's role within regional and global education networks.

4.2.2. Challenges

4.2.2.1. Language barriers and cultural differences

- Limitations in foreign language proficiency among students and lecturers hinder access to international programs and materials.
- Cultural differences in international working environments also pose significant challenges.

4.2.2.2. High costs and dependence on international projects

- The transfer of curricula and procurement of advanced training equipment are often costly, exceeding the financial capacity of many institutions.
- Excessive reliance on international aid may undermine the sustainability of cooperation.

4.2.2.3. Lack of mechanisms for recognition of qualifications and vocational skills

- Vietnamese vocational diplomas and certificates are not widely recognized internationally, limiting labour mobility.
- Quality assurance mechanisms and the standardization of vocational skills remain inconsistent.

4.2.2.4. Uneven capacity of teaching staff and facilities

- Some institutions are able to integrate quickly, but many VET institutions still lack internationally qualified lecturers and face outdated infrastructure.
- This results in significant disparities in the quality of cooperation.

4.2.2.5. Regional and global competition

- Within the ASEAN region and globally, Vietnam competes with countries that have already advanced in VET, such as Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.
- Without a clear strategy, Vietnam risks falling behind in attracting partners and international learners.

4.3. Key Success Factors

The research findings indicate that the effectiveness of international cooperation in VET depends on several critical factors:

4.3.1. Consistent policies and a clear legal framework

- Documents such as the Law on Vocational Education (2014), the VET Development Strategy 2021–2030 with a vision to 2045, and bilateral/multilateral agreements provide a stable legal framework.
- Policy consistency ensures long-term confidence for both Vietnamese institutions and international partners.

4.3.2. Engagement of enterprises, particularly FDI companies

- Enterprises play a central role in developing output standards, designing training programs, and providing practical training sites.
- Cooperation with FDI corporations helps standardize technology and processes while creating international employment opportunities for students.

4.3.3. Standardization of teaching staff competencies

- Training and upgrading lecturers according to international competency frameworks (e.g., German, Australian, or Korean standards) is decisive for training quality.
- Special attention should be given to bilingual teaching, digital competencies, and practical pedagogical skills.

4.3.4. Comprehensive capacity building for learners

- Beyond vocational skills, students must be equipped with foreign languages, soft skills, innovative thinking, and digital competencies.
- These are key to adapting to the international labour market.

4.3.5. Financial resources and infrastructure

- Effective international cooperation requires VET institutions to possess standard-compliant facilities and modern labs/workshops.
- Sustainable financial resources from state budgets, enterprise partners, and international projects are essential to ensure success.

4.3.6. Strategic partnerships and sustainable cooperation

- Building strategic partnerships with international schools and organizations enhances reputation and expands the scope of cooperation.
- Partnerships must be maintained on the basis of trust and mutual benefits, rather than limited short-term exchanges.

4.3.7. Application of digital transformation in governance and training

- The use of digital learning platforms, student data management, and cross-border online training expands the scale of cooperation.
- Digital technology also provides tools for transparency, monitoring, and evaluation of cooperation outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

International cooperation in vocational education and training (VET) is an inevitable trend in the context of globalization and international economic integration. The findings demonstrate that such cooperation has brought significant benefits to Vietnam, including the transfer of advanced training technologies, enhancement of institutional governance, development of teaching staff, and increased international employment opportunities for students. However, its effectiveness remains limited due

to language barriers, lack of qualification recognition, inconsistent infrastructure, and dependence on external financial resources.

To seize opportunities and overcome challenges, Vietnam needs to implement several key policy directions:

- Develop a national strategy for the internationalization of VET: integrate internationalization objectives into national human resource development programs, with a long-term roadmap aligned with labour market needs.
- Establish and expand international cooperation networks: strengthen relations with organizations such as ILO, OECD, and UNESCO, while broadening bilateral and multilateral cooperation with countries strong in VET.
- Encourage enterprises, especially FDI companies, to participate in dual training: create incentive mechanisms through tax benefits and policy support to strengthen the link between training and actual labor demand.
- Invest in developing internationally qualified lecturers and experts: promote exchange and training programs abroad, while enhancing language skills, digital competencies, and practical pedagogical capacity.
- Apply digital transformation in international cooperation: develop cross-border online training platforms and build vocational human resource databases to enhance transparency and management efficiency.

These policy implications not only contribute to improving the quality of VET in Vietnam but also strengthen the nation's competitiveness at the regional and global levels.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

6.1. Limitations

Although this paper has provided an overview of trends, opportunities, challenges, and key success factors in international cooperation in vocational education and training (VET), several limitations remain:

6.1.1. Methodological limitations

- The paper mainly relies on secondary data analysis, including reports from domestic and international organizations, as well as a few case studies.
- It lacks large-scale quantitative surveys to measure the impact of international cooperation on students' skills, employability, and income after graduation.

6.1.2. Narrow research scope

The study primarily focuses on colleges and large-scale cooperation programs, without sufficiently analyzing the participation of non-public VET institutions or smaller-scale cooperation initiatives.

6.1.3. Lack of regional comparative data

Differences in socio-economic conditions and the level of VET development across regions have not been clearly examined, making it difficult to generalize the findings.

6.2. Future research directions

Future studies could focus on:

- Conducting large-scale quantitative surveys to measure the impact of international cooperation on training quality, employment rates, and student income.
- Carrying out comparative studies between urban and rural institutions, as well as between public and non-public VET providers.
- Examining equity in access to international cooperation opportunities across different groups (e.g., gender, region, economic conditions).
- Investigating the impact of digital transformation and the emerging trend of green jobs on international cooperation in VET.

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