

# Measures of Organising Educational Activities for Students after Junior High School Graduation and Solutions Applied in Vietnamese Vocational Education Colleges

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Vocational education and training (VET) in Vietnam has changed remarkably to heed enterprises' increasing demands for skilled workers, as evidenced by the diversity and high enrolment in vocational training programs at VET colleges. However, VET colleges still have difficulties in attracting ninth-grade pupils to enrol. This article discussed possible solutions for increasing the number of pupils enrolling in VET colleges, and in forming the basic orientations for the development of training models in Vietnamese VET colleges. The result has certain implications regarding the measures of organising educational activities (MOEA) for pupils, ensuring the national human resources structure, and reducing the time and costs of learning.

**Key words:** *Vocational education and training, vocational training after junior high school graduation, human resources structure, measures of organising the educational activities for pupils.*

## Introduction

Vocational training contributes more directly to economic development than general training and plays an important role in satisfying the demand for skilled labour in rapidly transforming economies (Lewis & Cheng, 2006). Since general training is often too academic, it is necessary, and costly, for employers to take measures to adapt formal general graduates to real tasks, in turn resulting in resource waste (Mouzakitis, 2010; Colley et al., 2003; Tsang, 1997; Bosch, & Charest, 2008). The importance of vocational training is also highlighted in the context of globalisation where a diversified training curriculum is crucial in maintaining adaptation and

competitiveness for learners (Psacharopoulos, 1997; Lillis & Hogan, 1983). The advantages of a vocational training curriculum compared with general training are numerous. First, vocational training provides marketable technical skills, rather than academic knowledge, which are highly applicable in various fields and allows increased emphasis on a particular career (Zimmermann, 2013; Oksanen-Ylikoski & Ylikoski, 2015). Second, unlike academic training where changes and adjustments in curriculum are slow and restricted, the flexibility of vocational training, which is shaped by the real demands of enterprises, could prepare learners for upcoming challenges and bridge the gap between theory to practical works (Deissinger, 1996; Elfering et al., 2000). Third, vocational training offers an alternative pathway to higher education through inter-college transition, permitting students to return to academic study for career advancement (Giret, 2011; Moeniak & Worswick, 2003; Eichhorst et al., 2015).

Vocational education and training (VET) in Vietnam has changed rapidly in order to provide human resources that satisfy enterprises' demands (Kelly, 2000). Before 1986, the General Department of Vocation Training managed the financing of VET to provide society with workers, technicians and managers in a diverse range of economic segments. It was during this period that VET witnessed a peak in VET schools. However, after 1986 and the "Doi Moi" economic renovation policy, a sharp decline in VET schools and vocational learners took place. After that, the demand for VET become drastically hindered as a new wave of foreign investment came, calling for more highly skilled labour (Agrawal, 2013). Since 2010 the Vietnamese government planned to revamp the VET to fulfil the demand for more skilled workers (Tran et al., 2016; Tuan & Cuong, 2019). However, solutions for enrolling ninth-grade pupils in VET colleges in the vocational guidance programs have not been carried out synchronously, clearly, and effectively (Bui Van Hung, 2014). This resulted in an unbalance in human resources training in VET colleges and enterprises, which impacted the national human resources structure directly and hindered the development of VET colleges (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010; Tsang, 1997).

In the context of the innovation and improvement of Vietnamese VET quality, VET colleges have to be clearly aware of a new task in training, that is, they must focus on improving vocational training quality, consider the measure of the labour market as the decisive factor that determines VET quality, promote MOEA and attract junior high school pupils to enrol in VET colleges (Viet, 2009; Thang & Quang, 2007). The accomplishment of these tasks greatly contributes in making the VET colleges a solution to shortages in skilled labour and for securing national human resources for long-term development (Party Central Committee of Vietnam, 2019). This article presents the research results of the training program for the ninth-grade pupils in Vietnamese VET colleges and suggests suitable solutions in the context of Vietnam.

## **Method of Research**

In this study, two main methods, including theoretical survey and in-depth interview, were carried out.

In the theoretical method, various training documents, guidance and reports on VET, MOEA, and assessment of VET impacts to enterprises in the past years were collected and analysed. Various components including time, programs, regulations, material facilities and training standards were examined to assess the realities of training the ninth-grade pupils in VET colleges. In addition, enterprises' training demands and the labour market for human resources at professional secondary schools and college levels were evaluated to form suitable training models and solutions.

In the second stage of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the College Board, the Heads of Academic Affairs Departments and Deans at some VET colleges in Ho Chi Minh City. Various aspects of VET were discussed with entrepreneurs, education experts and vocational education experts including the issue of human resources demands and training programs at the professional secondary school and college levels. Lastly, interview statistics were compared with the training statistics to ensure the accuracy of the interview.

## **Research results and discussion**

### ***Tendencies of the Ninth-Grade Pupils' Vocational Learning Demands after Junior High School Graduation***

Despite the recent increase in the number of ninth-grade pupils taking vocational courses, enrolment has always fallen short of the training capacities of VET schools (Dang Danh Anh, 2000; Duong & Morgan, 2001).

In Vietnam, the Ho Chi Minh City College of Technology II (HVCT) is considered as one of the first VET colleges that developed the vocational training program for pupils after junior high school graduation. From the figures in Table 1, it is clear that the number of pupils taking vocational classes early after junior high school graduation increased over the three examined years. However, MOEA for pupils is still limited (Nguyen Thi Hang and Bui Van Hung, 2015). This contrasts to some European countries where the proportion of MOEA for pupils after junior high school graduation is more than the proportion of pupils learning at high school (Table 2) (Bosch, 2010; Polesel, 2008).

**Table 1:** The number of students learning at the College of Technology II (Ho Chi Minh City, 2019)

Year 2016	Year 2017	Year 2018
465 pupils	1746 pupils	777 pupils

**Table 2:** The proportion of MOEA for pupils after junior high school graduation in some European countries (Ministry of Education and Training, 2010)

Countries	VET (%)	High-school education %
Austria	81	19
Hungary	73	27
Germany	72	28
Finland	70	30
Belgium	61	39
Norway	58	42
Denmark	57	43
France	54	46
Sweden	52	48
Finland	52	48
Greece	47	53
Spain	39	61
England	31	69
Portugal	29	71
Estonia	26	74

In general, it seemed that the proportion of pupils learning at Vietnamese VET colleges is not high and stable in comparison with figures of European countries. In addition, the training models are not formed and MOEA for pupils is not effective (Hanushek et al., 2017). Thus, solutions that specify flexible training models to increase the number of pupils learning at vocational education colleges are important to ensure the national human resources structure and to sustainably develop vocational education colleges in Vietnam (Pham Minh Hac, 2011; Hillmert & Jacob, 2003; Heinz et al., 1998; Ulimwengu & Badiane, 2010).

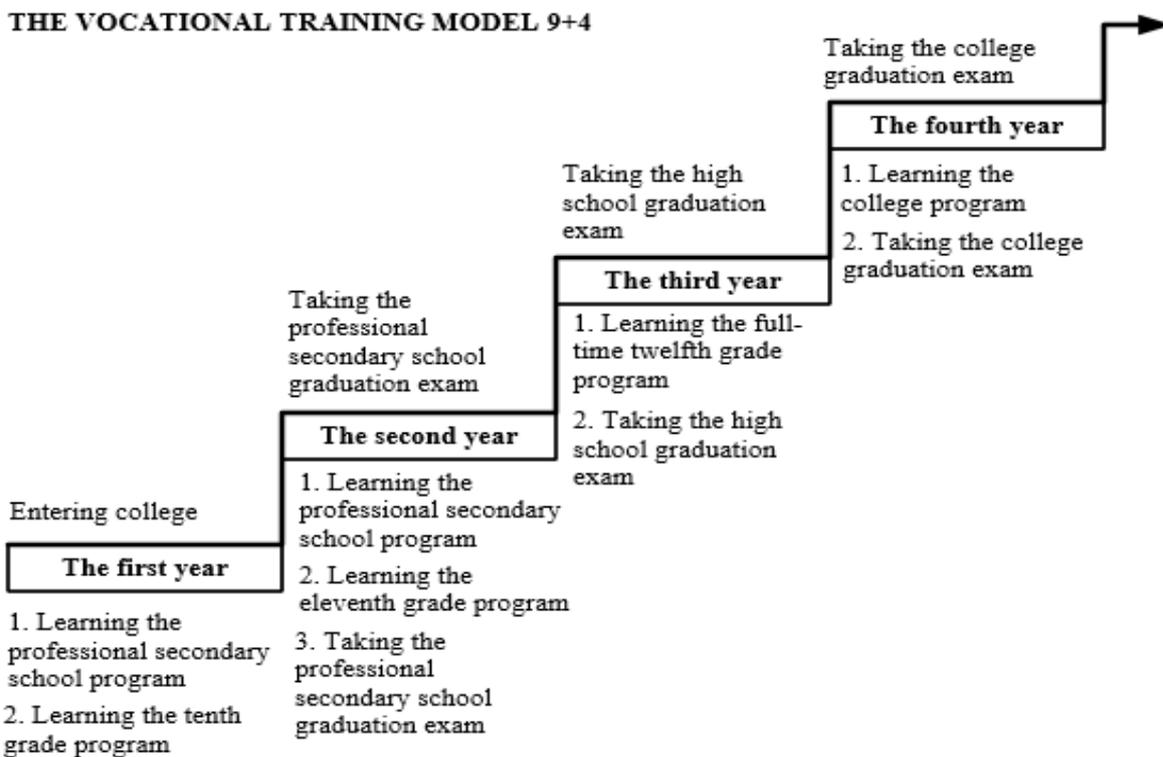
### ***Vocational Training Models for Pupils after Junior High School Graduation (The Vocational Training 9+) In Vietnam***

VET colleges are focusing on developing training programs for junior high school pupils to attract them to enrol in VET colleges. The 9+ vocational training models are described as follows:

### ***The Vocational Training Model 9 + 4***

The 9+4 vocational training model is a model where the learning period of 4 years at VET colleges follows the graduation from junior high school (secondary school) after 9 years. In this model, students simultaneously undergo 2 training programs: the vocational training program and the high school program of continuing education in which the completion of the latter is followed by the high school graduation exam. Graduation from the 9+4 model awards a pupil with 2 diplomas: the high school diploma and the college diploma and allows the transition from college to university. The training process based on the training model 9+4 is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The vocational training model 9+4

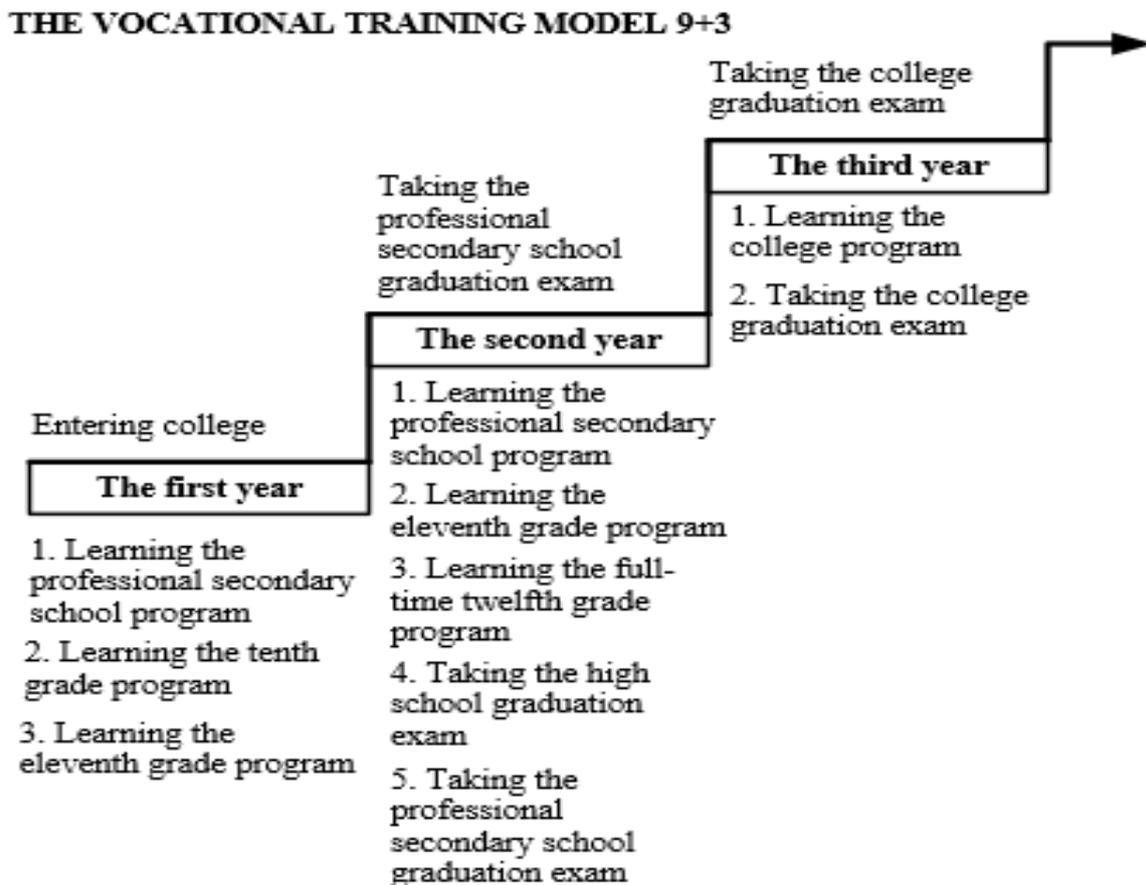


In parallel with the vocational training period that spans across 4 years to obtain the diploma of College, a student also learns 7 subjects (Literature, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History and Geography). In the first, second and third year, the student takes the course of said subjects which is equivalent to the tenth-, eleventh- and twelfth grade of the mainstream curriculum. The final year involves taking the graduation exam and finishes the vocational training. In this model, although students are allowed to make the transition from college to university, the training time is long and the curriculum is excessive, requiring students to have suitable learning strategies and plans.

### ***The Vocational Training Model 9+ 3***

In comparison to the 9+4 model, the 9+3 vocational training model is shorter with 3 years of studying at VET colleges. The model consists of the vocational program and the reduced high school program required by regulation. However, those who learn the reduced high school program will only be awarded with the certificates of the reduced high school program. Thus, after finishing the vocational training model 9+ 3, students will get certificates of the reduced high school program and have the right to take the graduation exam of the vocational training program to get college diplomas. However, they are not allowed to make the transition from college to university. The training process of the vocational training model 9+3 is shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** The vocational training model 9+4



In the 9+3 model, students are only required to take 4 subjects including Literature, Maths, Physics and Chemistry in parallel with the vocational curriculum. Students will take the curriculum that is equivalent to the tenth grade of the mainstream curriculum in the first year and finish the eleventh grade in the second year. The third year is reserved for preparation and

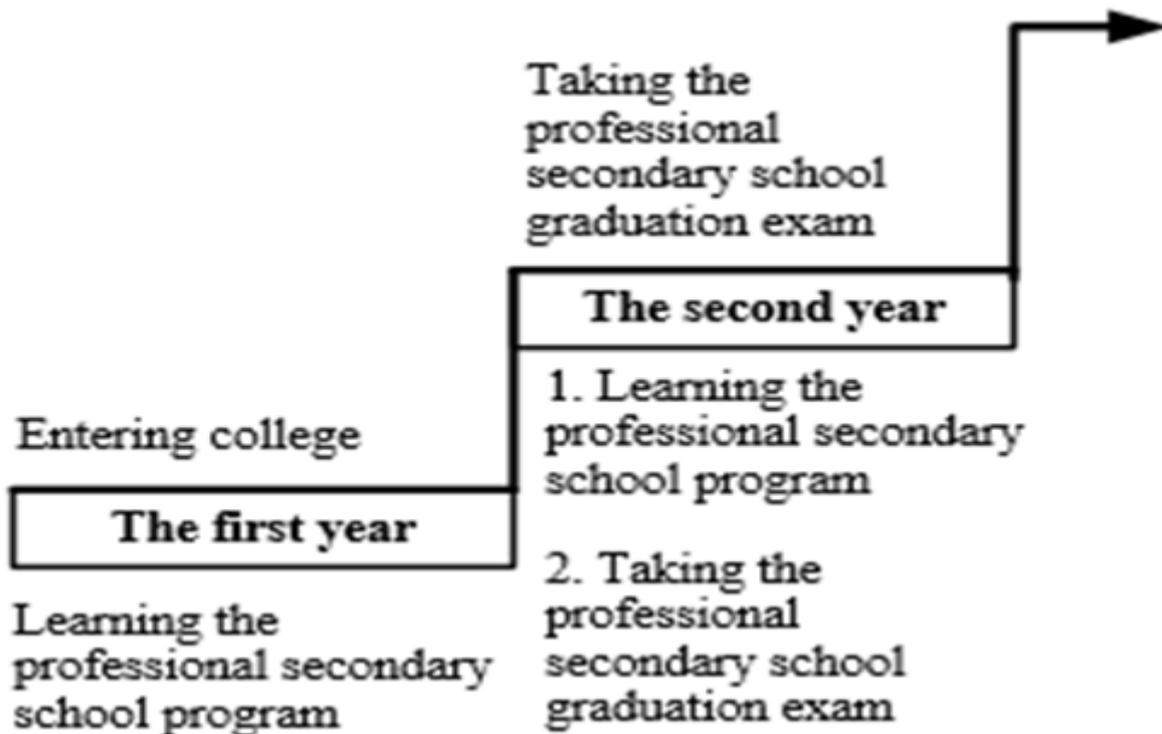
the taking of the graduation exam for both general training and vocational training study. Compared to the 9+4 model, the training time is shorter, and the learning pressure is manageable. However, the main disadvantage is that students will not have the right to make the transition from college to university after graduation.

### *The Vocational Training Model 9+ 2*

An even more condensed vocational training scheme is the 9+2 model in which the student will take 2 years of training in VET colleges after junior high school graduation. In this model, the mainstream curriculum is completely omitted in the training process and only diplomas of professional secondary school are awarded to the learners. In addition, inter-college transfer is not allowed in this model. As a result, learners will have very quick access to the labour market. However, this model is not advisable for students who are likely to seek further education for career advancement. The training process of the training model 9+2 is shown in (Figure 3)

**Figure 3.** The vocational training model 9+2

### **THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING MODEL 9+2**



In general, each model has its own strengths and weaknesses. However, in the context of innovative vocational training, it is necessary to ensure inter-college transfer to satisfy students' demands to continue their study in the future. Therefore, the training model 9+4 should be

applied widely at vocational education colleges to meet pupils' needs and the demands of the society (Kahyarara & Teal, 2008).

### ***Solutions of MOEA for Apprentices by the Training Models 9+***

Based on recommendations of experts, some implications for MOEA for high school students could be proposed.

First, awareness of MOEA for pupils in the VET system should be promoted and the training objectives should be innovated and clarified to suit the labour market's demands. In addition, credibility of the whole VET system should be improved and career guidance and MOEA for pupils should be promoted (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018). These measures could regularise MOEA after junior high school graduation and cause parents and society to perceptually deemphasise the diploma, and thus situate vocational learning as the second choice (Hirshleifer et al., 2016; Powell & Solga, 2010).

Second, better inter-college transfer policies in the vocational education system should also be formulated. Opinions from surveyed experts suggest that two additional transfer pathways, vertical and horizontal inter-college transfer, should be implemented. The vertical inter-college transfer policy aims to facilitate the gradual educational progress from the low levels to the high level (Hoelscher et al., 2008). The horizontal inter-college transfer is to focus on high school pupils, apprentices, and professional secondary school pupils. When high school pupils finish the eleventh grade and feel that university is not suitable for their wishes, they have the right to transfer to the vocational program. This applies to apprentices who are would be able to transfer to the high school program as well (Kuijpers et al., 2011).

The final solution is to change public awareness in vocational education colleges through media. In the context of the industrial revolution 4.0, innovative education in vocational education colleges needs to change and should consider the media as one of their most vital resources. Leaders of the vocational education colleges have to change flexibly and be aware of the media completely so that the media is performed more effectively (Meer, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

Rapidly changing labour structure and labour market demands are calling for renovated Vietnamese VET in terms of training quality and enrolment quantity. Therefore, it is necessary to innovate our mindset in terms of human resources training, to diversify learning models, to improve policy mechanisms and to carry out MOEA after junior high school graduation. Such measures should focus on the formation of 9+ vocational training models to increase the



number of pupils enrolling in VET colleges and enhance the proportion of skilled labourers in the national labour force.



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