

# VOCATIONAL TRAINING EXPERIENCE IN ASSOCIATION WITH SOLVING EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES FOR RURAL WORKERS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIETNAM

PhD. Nguyen Thanh Thao\*

**Abstract:** *In Vietnam, the proportion of the agricultural workforce receiving vocational training remains low compared to the overall agricultural labor force and the demand within the sector. The structure of vocational training programs is not yet well-aligned with the agricultural restructuring progress and rural development. Studying the vocational training experience and policies for rural workers of several developed countries, such as China, South Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Netherlands, and Australia, can provide valuable insights and recommendations for Vietnam. These insights can help guide the country in refining its vocational training strategies to solve employment challenges, facilitate labor market transitions in rural areas, and achieve breakthroughs in modernizing agriculture and rural industry by leveraging existing culture, traditions, and resource advantages.*

• Keywords: *vocational training, rural workers, apprenticeship, vocational training for rural workers.*

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## 1. Vocational training for rural workers

Vocational training refers to the teaching and learning activities designed to equip learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes to secure employment, create their own jobs after completing the course, or advance their career (Vocational Education Law, 2014).

From this perspective, vocational training encompasses two closely interconnected and inseparable processes: vocational training and apprenticeship. *Vocational training*, in a general sense, refers to the comprehensive set of activities aimed at imparting occupational skills to learners. More specifically, it is the process by which instructors convey both theoretical and practical knowledge to students, enabling them to develop proficiency, skills, and dexterity in their profession. *Apprenticeship* involves the process by which learners absorb theoretical and practical knowledge, ultimately achieving a certain level of professional competence.

*Vocational training for rural workers* involves teaching and learning activities designed to equip rural workers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes to meet the demands of rural economic and social development. It is a purposeful process aimed at enhancing the quality of

the rural workforce to support rural industrialization and modernization. This is a coordinated set of decisions made and implemented by the government, targeting specific object groups to improve the quality of rural labor, thereby achieving economic and social development goals, particularly in the agricultural sector. The primary focus of vocational training for rural workers is on practical skills, alongside essential knowledge and professional skills related to industry and services, often with a particular emphasis on specialized areas within agriculture, forestry, and fisheries.

Vocational training policies for rural workers are state-led strategies and solutions aimed at equipping rural laborers with the necessary knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes to meet the demands of rural economic and social development (*Ta Thi Bich Ngoc, 2023*).

## 2. Some International Experience

### 2.1. The experience of China

China is one of the world's largest agricultural producers, with a population exceeding 1.4 billion, including 551.92 million people living in rural areas (39.4% of the population). The rural workforce comprises 332 million employed individuals (*China Statistical Yearbook, 2020*). The country is home to a significant number of professional farmers who

\*Academy of Finance; email: [thanhthaonguyennntt@hvtc.edu.vn](mailto:thanhthaonguyennntt@hvtc.edu.vn)

are well-educated, possessing deep agricultural knowledge and strong business skills (*Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2020*).

Firstly, China has effectively implemented policies aligned with the directives and strategies of the Communist Party of China. The Party has outlined rural reform and development policies within its broader strategy for urban and rural economic and social development, encapsulated in the “Tam Nong - Three Rural Issues” policy (*agriculture, farmers, and rural areas*). Additionally, various policies related to comprehensive rural development have been introduced, focusing on infrastructure, and improving the rural workforce. Enhancing the quality of human resources is considered central to the “Three Rural Issues” policy, addressing employment, labor structure transitions, and labor mobility, particularly the shift from rural areas to non-agricultural sectors.

Secondly, China has identified key pillars in vocational training that are linked to labor restructuring. The country’s vocational training policy for rural workers is connected to labor restructuring and addressing employment, and is built on four main pillars: (1) vocational training for agricultural production, (2) vocational training for non-agricultural sectors such as food processing, handicrafts, and ecotourism, (3) training in marketing skills and small-scale agricultural trade, and (4) the establishment of small and medium-sized rural enterprises to attract and retain local labor (<https://dangcongson.vn>).

Thirdly, China has established clear principles for vocational training linked to rural labor restructuring and addressing employment. The country’s vocational training for rural workers follows 4 guiding principles:

- (1) Bringing employment education to villages and communes;
- (2) Demand-driven vocational education;
- (3) Standardization of educational activities;
- (4) Strict management of vocational training.

The objective of these principles is to create favorable conditions for farmers, enabling them to find time and opportunities for learning. Vocational training programs are designed seasonally, catering to specific fields and the needs of learners, thereby fostering motivation and encouraging creativity. The management criteria for learners are rigorously enforced to ensure the effectiveness of both teaching

and learning processes. The action program ‘One Million Chinese Students Return to Work in Rural Areas for Two Years’ was implemented. The evaluation and verification of the workmanship of professional farmers are conducted by local authorities and recorded in a digital database for easy access by managers when necessary (<https://nongnghiep.vn>).

China has diversified training methods: formal, informal, integrated, and distance learning programs. An emphasis is placed on training through television channels, which the Chinese government considers a primary method for professional agricultural technical education, career transition training, and dissemination of market knowledge and policies to farmers. In addition, there is support from an extensive radio network that connects central to local levels. Basic education for the general workforce is being strengthened, with priority given to developing high-quality talent at universities and research institutes. Special attention is also given to training technical and specialized talents through the network of key secondary schools (*Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2020*).

Fourthly, China has effectively implemented vocational training projects that are closely linked to the restructuring of rural labor and addressing local employment. Under the slogan “Everyone Should Have Knowledge,” workers who are untrained or have low skill levels are encouraged to participate in training programs. The “Light Program” focuses on providing training and career guidance for rural workers. The “Thousands of Villages Project” aims to establish retail stores in rural areas, with the dual objectives of creating jobs for rural laborers and delivering high-quality products to farmers

Fifthly, China has undertaken projects to develop enterprises, cooperatives, and leading associations in the agricultural production sector, with the goal of “One Commune, One Enterprise; One Town, One Product.” China has increased investment in rural infrastructure and eliminated tuition fees in rural areas. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, has participated in vocational training for rural workers, training an average of about 1 million laborers from disadvantaged regions each year. In mountainous and remote areas, vocational training is provided, and workers are then sent to more developed economic regions to find employment (<https://www.hids.hochiminhcity.gov.vn>)

The government has allowed training institutions to offer skill development courses and has encouraged citizens to start their own businesses. Efforts have been made to restructure the local labor force and create employment opportunities for workers migrating from urban areas back to rural regions during times of crisis. Through the rural labor mobility policy, up to 50 million farmers have received training. Administrative processes for establishing businesses have been simplified, with business registration fees waived, and graduates are encouraged to return to their hometowns to start enterprises. The government has also strengthened cooperation between vocational training institutions and employers, helping to increase the formal employment rate in the agricultural sector. (<https://tcnn.vn>).

## 2.2. The experience of Japan

Japan has been facing a severe labor shortage due to its aging population and the widening gap between urban and rural areas. In response, Japan has intensified its efforts to develop rural education and vocational training to enhance the quality of the workforce, aligning it with the needs of non-agricultural industries. Despite being a highly developed industrial nation, Japan's journey toward industrialization and modernization began with significant advancements in agriculture.

Firstly, Japan has implemented universal education that the population of compulsory age must complete compulsory education for a period of 6 to 9 years. The Japanese government established the School Education Law and Basic Education Law in the late 1940s, and by the 1980s, universal education had been widely adopted. Notably, since the 1960s, Japan has set out a direction for the development of selective agricultural production, refining agricultural structures, and developing farming households and cooperatives with strong management and cultivation capabilities. Consequently, Japan has built a comprehensive national network for agricultural education, research, and experimentation, including over 60 agricultural universities and more than 600 technical agricultural schools, with about 40% of young people enrolling in Agricultural Universities. Japan emphasizes vocational training prior to employment to enhance the quality of its workforce and ensure laborers can adapt to market demands. Various training programs are provided to rural workers, equipping them with the necessary skills to meet the needs of the market.

Secondly, vocational training for rural workers in Japan focuses on equipping them with skills in production, farm household management, scientific and technological knowledge, and understanding market demands through the development of cooperative models. The Japanese government supports skilled rural laborers by facilitating their accumulation of land, enhancing production, and enabling them to become professional farmers who manage and circulate goods through cooperatives (Nguyen Hong Thu, <https://iasvn.org>). In Japan, most farmers voluntarily join cooperatives. This model operates multi-functionally in terms of business operations, without being limited in terms of scale. These multi-functionally cooperatives engage in various activities, including marketing, supply provision, money transfer, insurance, vocational training, and agricultural business guidance for members. Promoting agricultural skills and enhancing professional competencies are the main contents of the agricultural operation guidelines. Cooperatives undertake vocational training and technical dissemination, establish agricultural advisory groups, and work to integrate cooperative activities with administrative bodies, agricultural research institutions, veterinary officials, and other scientific research groups.

Thirdly, vocational training for farmers focuses on traditional product processing skills. Adhering to the principle of 'One Village, One Product,' Japan not only maintains and develops its traditional products but also emphasizes the creation of new ones. Farmers in artisanal villages have been innovative in combining production with community and eco-tourism, fully exploiting the inherent potential of their localities.

Fourthly, Japan efficiently mobilizes resources for the vocational training of rural laborers. The Japanese Agricultural Cooperative Law stipulates that 'all cooperatives must allocate 5% of their annual profits to vocational training for their members and staff' to enhance their knowledge and skills, thereby benefiting the cooperative itself. Cooperatives have dedicated training funds and provide financial support to encourage members and staff to participate in external training programs (Institute of Educational Science, 2013). Additionally, the Japanese government focuses on investing in agricultural science and technology, promoting a tripartite linkage between researchers, producers, and farmers. This approach helps farmers access

advanced technologies, boosts labor productivity, and supports sustainable agricultural development.

Fifthly, Japan integrates vocational training with employment and migration solutions. Alongside agricultural production development, Japan prioritizes the growth of industries and services in rural areas to address employment for agricultural laborers and the migration of people from rural to urban areas. The development of industrial parks and export processing zones in suburban areas aims to stimulate rural development and foster modern enterprises in rural regions. Investments are made in infrastructure such as seaports, highways, and telecommunications systems to attract investment into rural areas, create local jobs, reduce labor migration, and stabilize the labor market and social conditions (Nguyen Quoc Dung, 2020).

### 2.3. The experience of Korea

Implementation of the national economic and social development strategy, South Korea has focused on rural development since the early 1960s, particularly emphasized the building and enhancement of rural human resources to support the “New rural development” movement. Vocational training which is linked to labor restructuring and addressing employment is reflected in the following aspects:

Firstly, vocational training aims to shift rural residents’ mindset towards self-reliance with government support. By investing in the training of project management staff, the government has increased its investment in vocational training for rural laborers. This helps individuals build confidence in their abilities, encouraging them to be proactive and innovative in rural development efforts and to effectively utilize their trained skills. The combination of material support and vocational training, along with the development of open and flexible policies, is intended to motivate people to fully harness their existing potential. Education and training drive the enhancement of human resources quality; vocational training helps individuals understand and implement rural development projects, improve income, and elevate their professional skills. The government also focuses on creating and spreading advanced models in the new rural movement and exemplary cooperatives in villages and towns (<https://truongchinhtrithanhhoa.gov.vn>). The Government has built a strategy for developing human resources in agriculture and rural areas with the goal of helping

people to be confident in themselves in the face of difficulties so that they can be more proactive, positive, and creative in their work. (Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agricultural and Rural Development, 2020).

Secondly, specialized training and the transfer of technical skills and work competencies to laborers should align with the development needs of various economic sectors. The state, businesses, and economic organizations all share the responsibility of transferring knowledge, vocational training, and work skills to farmers, enhancing their production capabilities and boosting labor productivity. Based on the long-term, medium-term, and short-term economic development orientations of the country in general and the region in particular, localities should proactively provide vocational training to improve the quality of human resources and meet the economic demands of specific industries and sectors. The government should invest comprehensively in establishing vocational training facilities and enhancing the skills and expertise of the workforce. Continuous monitoring and timely adjustments to vocational training efforts should be made, aligning with labor restructuring and labor mobility in the context of Industry 4.0 to address practical challenges in agriculture.

Thirdly, appropriate credit policies are in place to support young workers and those new to the profession. The government covers training, consulting, and guardian costs for participants in these programs. During high school, vocational subjects are integrated into the curriculum to help develop a young workforce with a basic understanding and professional skills in emerging economic sectors (Vi Van Hung, Nguyen Thi Linh Huong, 2013). South Korea focuses on young agricultural workers by facilitating their access to new professions and has policies to appoint highly skilled professionals as consultants and guardians for inexperienced young workers involved in agricultural production (Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2020).

Fourthly, vocational training should be linked to urbanization efforts to reduce developmental disparities between rural and urban areas. The strategy for industrialization and modernization began in the 1960s with a series of coordinated policies, including the ‘Agricultural and Fisheries Successor Training Fund Law,’ the ‘Rural Revitalization Law,’ the ‘Local Industry Development Law,’ and the

‘Rural Industrialization Plan.’ Initially, these policies focused on training related to local enterprises within the scope of ‘households.’ By the 1970s, the ‘New Village Movement’ shifted its focus to developing large-scale enterprises with various incentives. These businesses played a significant role in creating employment opportunities for rural workers in South Korea.

#### 2.4. The experience of Thailand

By the year 2000, Thailand was still considered a traditional agricultural country with 80% of its population living in the rural areas. However, recent strong economic development has shifted the focus from agriculture to industrial and service sectors, leading to significant changes in the labor market. Despite this shift, agriculture remains a major source of employment, accounting for approximately 40% of the labor force and contributing around 10% to the country’s GDP (<https://vinanet.vn>). This outcome reflects the substantial efforts and contributions made through vocational training.

*Firstly, Thailand has implemented a series of strategies related to vocational training for rural labor, linking vocational training with production and marketing of agricultural products.* To promote learning and enhance the skills of its people, the government has established vocational training programs and specialized courses in agriculture and rural development. This includes strengthening the role of individuals and organizations in the agricultural sector, applying scientific and technological advancements to farming, and enabling farmers to access new technologies. Since 2013, the Thai government has launched the “Smart Agriculture” project, with over 90% of Thai farmers using machinery and equipment in agricultural production (<https://www.khuyennongvn.gov.vn>). The government has also enacted policies that integrate vocational training with production and marketing of agricultural products to enhance competitiveness, while simultaneously investing in infrastructure development to support agriculture and rural areas, thus addressing much of the surplus labor in rural regions.

*Secondly, Thailand has strengthened its efforts to train and retrain the workforce to meet the demands of agricultural production in alignment with the changes brought about by Industry 4.0.* Through vocational training programs about food processing, handicrafts, eco-tourism, marketing skills, and small and medium-sized agricultural businesses,

as well as support for establishing enterprise; concurrently, the government has implemented strategies to transform growth models and economic development, shift economic and labor structures, and promote the growth of processing industries, services, and tourism, thereby enabling Thai farmers to secure employment after apprenticeship (<https://dangcongsan.vn>). Thailand emphasizes enhancing scientific and technological skills for rural workers to address labor shortages in the industrial and service sectors moving into rural areas. As of 2020, Thailand had nearly 200 organizations providing training and technical education for rural labor, with a capacity of up to 5,000 students per year (*Nguyen Quoc Dung, 2020*).

*Thirdly, Thailand has revamped its economic growth model by developing key sectors in agriculture and integrating traditional products based on local resources and cultural advantages.* This strategy involves restructuring industries to support rural industrial development while considering the availability of resources and traditional production skills. It focuses on developing key industries for export and promoting the processing of agricultural products. The successful implementation of the ‘One Village, One Product’ program and the ‘Village Fund’ program has contributed to this effort. Additionally, the growth model has shifted towards services, leading to a transition of the labor force from agriculture to service activities, particularly rural tourism and eco-tourism, by leveraging the region’s cultural, traditional, and natural resources.

#### 2.5. The experience of Netherlands

The Netherlands has the lowest per capita arable land area in the world, at just about 0.58 hectares per person. Despite this, it boasts a highly developed and competitive agricultural sector, supported by excellent infrastructure and advanced scientific knowledge. To achieve these results, the Netherlands government has implemented several strategies for developing high-quality agricultural human resources, particularly through a comprehensive agricultural education policy. Netherlands agricultural education is divided into four levels:

- (1) Primary education in agriculture, which lasts 4 years, is taught in general schools or gardening, and can be shortened depending on the actual situation;
- (2) Secondary education in agriculture, taught in general schools and gardening, lasts from 1.5 to 3 years, depending on the program of each school;

(3). Higher education in agriculture: Available at agricultural colleges and universities, with 3 to 4-year programs;

(4). Agricultural Science Education: Conducted at Wageningen University, with a 6 to 7- year program.

These educational institutions and programs are developed by the government, private, or social organizations. Students in these schools pay a very small fee, and Dutch agricultural education emphasizes practical experience and skill development.

### 2.6. The experience of Australia

The Australian government has directed the development of its agriculture sector as an industry. Even though arable land constitutes only 1% of the continent's total area and the harsh natural conditions such as limited rainfall and frequent droughts the agricultural workforce is relatively small, making up about 4% of the country's total labor force. Nonetheless, Australia ranks among the top in the world for self-sufficiency in food. Since the 1990s, the Australian government has focused on investing in agriculture with the goal of achieving self-sufficiency. This includes organizing production in farm settings with highly educated and skilled workers (31% hold university or college degrees). The government has implemented the program "Advanced Agriculture Aimed at Export" with the following specific objectives:

(1) Enhance Farmers' Participation in Learning Activities: To improve competitiveness and promote sustainable development.

(2) Vocational Training to Change Farmers' Attitudes: To highlight the benefits of training and develop skills aligned with farm management needs.

(3) Further Skills Development: To improve farmers' abilities in engaging with learning activities that are practical and suited to their real-life circumstances.

(4) Financial Support for Farmers: To assist them in participating in training programs focused on natural resource management and financial management skills.

(5) Provide Information: To help farmers stay informed about market fluctuations both domestically and internationally, enabling them to adapt to unpredictable changes.

### 3. Some recommendations for Vietnam

Experience in vocational training associated with addressing employment and rural labor restructuring

of some countries gives Vietnam the following policy recommendations:

*Firstly, it is essential to raise awareness among rural laborers about the importance of vocational training. They must recognize that vocational training is a crucial and foundational element in the process of building new rural areas and successfully achieving rural industrialization and modernization, both locally and nationally.* Every country integrates vocational training into its human resource development strategies, encompassing short-term, medium-term, and long-term plans, and allocates optimal resources to this critical task. Farmers must deeply understand the role of vocational training to develop self-improvement plans that align with the basic job requirements of the labor market. The government should maximize opportunities for citizens to access vocational training programs that are consistent with the industrialization and modernization strategies, particularly in the context of international economic integration and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This includes accelerating research and the application of science and technology to create breakthroughs that modernize agriculture and rural industries.

*Secondly, it is essential to refine the legal documents related to vocational training for rural laborers.* Government advisory headquarters need to conduct thorough investigations to understand the apprenticeship needs of rural workers, ensuring alignment with policies, plans, and socio-economic development strategies to issue legal documents that meet market demands. Implementing measures to address employment and rural labor restructuring must be done in accordance with specific resolutions of the Central Committee and the Government. This includes refining laws that relate to vocational training, such as the Vocational Education Law and the Employment Law, as well as decisions on support and loan programs for vocational training and self-employment, tuition policies, the Prime Minister's vocational training plan for rural laborers, lifelong learning initiatives, and national programs for building new rural areas and sustainable poverty reduction. Revisions and updates should ensure that legal documents protect workers' rights before, during, and after vocational training. Additionally, policies, educational systems, output standards, and the recognition of vocational qualifications should all be improved.

**Thirdly**, vocational training must be integrated within a unified system of education, workforce development, and talent cultivation. Vocational training policies should be incorporated into the national education and training system. There should be a focus on orienting high school students towards agricultural vocational training, starting with pilot programs and progressing towards the broader implementation of vocational subjects in the high school curriculum. This approach aims to train a young workforce with the knowledge and flexible skills necessary to support economic restructuring and address employment needs. Vocational training must also be closely aligned with economic restructuring, particularly during the adjustment and expansion of new professions, efforts should be made to retrain the inappropriate workforce to enhance their opportunities in accessing new sectors and employment.

**Fourthly**, vocational training must be closely linked to addressing employment and the attraction of local employment opportunities, while also encouraging workers to return to rural areas to establish careers. Policies, plans, and development strategies should focus on economic and social infrastructure, improving the business investment environment, and offering incentives to attract investors into agriculture and related services. This approach will generate new local jobs, attract urban workers back to rural areas, and encourage rural workers to return and settle. These efforts can narrow the development gap between urban and rural areas, reduce rural-to-urban labor migration, and potentially create a reverse migration trend. Emphasis should be placed on the synergy between the “three parties”- the state, training institutions and businesses-in vocational training, particularly in fostering bilateral cooperation between training providers and employers. Japan’s cooperative model serves as a valuable lesson, highlighting the strength of rural community organizations in production consulting, vocational training, and enhancing the quality of human resources. This model nurtures talent within a disciplined and responsible workforce that supports each other in their work.

**Fifthly**, strengthening the role of government oversight in vocational training for rural workers is essential. The state must regularly inspect, monitor, and review the implementation of vocational training policies for rural labor. It is crucial to enhance the effectiveness of policy direction and management,

restructuring the vocational education system towards greater autonomy and accountability. Transparency in admissions and recruitment, particularly concerning rural labor, should be prioritized. Regular and systematic supervision of vocational training activities for rural workers must be conducted in accordance with legal regulations. Additionally, managing the labor market in general and the vocational training service system in particular should be based on the application of advanced, modern information technology to track economic restructuring and promptly adjust training programs accordingly.

**Sixthly**, mobilizing and utilizing appropriate resources successfully implement vocational training policies for rural workers. In addition to state investment resources, there should be a focus on socialization policies and public-private partnerships in vocational training activities, especially encouraging enterprises to engage in self-training and retraining for rural workers. The role of individuals and organizations in vocational training for rural workers must be strengthened to create local jobs and facilitate the labor restructuring from agriculture to industries, services, and tourism, leveraging culture, tradition, and available resources.

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