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## State management of vocational education in Vietnam: Inconstancy in the past and present challenges

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### Abstract

Vocational education is a level of the national education system, providing primary, intermediate, college and other vocational training programs. Vocational education has been formed and developed in Vietnam since 1945 until now as an inevitable requirement of the economy and society. This article presents state management activities for vocational education through periods and connects them to outline the ups and downs in the past and current challenges. The results show that state management activities are a major concern of the Vietnamese Government in all historical periods. Although it continuously shows worried and concern, the Government squirms and has not found any feasible solution in real terms to manage vocational education effectively. After nearly 80 years of construction and development, Vietnamese education has the opportunity to approach concept of vocational education in the world; The Government has institutionalized a number of viewpoints, guidelines and policies to develop vocational education. State management of vocational education in Vietnam today still has many existing challenges.

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### 1. Introduction

Vocational education is a level of the Vietnamese education system. The goal of vocational education is to train elementary levels, intermediate levels, college levels and other vocational training programs for workers, meeting direct human resource needs in production, business and services; vocational education includes two forms: formal training and continuing education. The characteristic of vocational education is to train human resources directly for production, business and services, with capacity to practice corresponding to the level of training; have ethics and health; have professional responsibility; have creative skills, adapt to the international integration environment; ensuring improved productivity and labor quality; create conditions for learners after completing the course to be able to find a job, create their own job or continue studying at a higher level. In Vietnam, vocational education plays an important role in training a workforce with technical expertise at all levels, contributing to creating jobs for people and promoting socio-economic development providing life and employment opportunities for people with many different circumstances, abilities and needs.

In recent years, Vietnam has paid great attention to vocational education. The State of Vietnam has institutionalized viewpoints, goals, and promulgated many solutions to develop vocational education. Solutions for Policy of developing vocational education not only aim to meet the need for trained human resources, especially skilled human resources for national development in each period, but also aim to develop vocational education integrates developed countries in the ASEAN region and the world. However, state management of vocational education still faces big challenges. The transition from the management of the Ministry of Education and Training to the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs raises many complex issues in

enrollment, vocational training and cultural training. Some old management mechanisms and policies are no longer appropriate, but new mechanisms and policies have not yet been issued. The consolidation of the organization at vocational education institutions is still slow and operations are not substantive.

Do these problems have historical causes? How do the ups and downs in state management of vocational education affect the reform and development of vocational education in Vietnam today? This paragraph will examine the process of changing about the state management activities of vocational education over time, exploring the ups and downs, bottlenecks from the past, and which bottlenecks still affect the process of innovation and development of vocational education in Vietnam today.

## 2. Historical documents and research methods

The historical documents used for this article include two sources: primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources include the system of legal documents of the Government of Vietnam through the periods deciding on the establishment of state management agencies on vocational education, stipulating positions, functions, and tasks of state management agencies; document stipulating the mechanisms, policies, and laws of the state and government for vocational education, including Government decrees, Government resolutions, and Laws promulgated by the National Assembly. In addition to primary sources, the article also uses information from secondary sources, including a number of publications related to Vietnamese education from 1945 until now. These publications have been approved by state management agencies, ensuring reliability for reference and use in scientific research.

Regarding research method, the article uses the interdisciplinary method of Historical Political Economy. This is an approach that allows for the study of how political actors interact over time (Jenkins & Rubin ed., 2023). The process of change, ups and downs of state management of vocational education is presented over time. By selecting events and presenting them over time, this study aims to clarify the position, function, and role of state management activities in vocational education, comparing changes over the periods of time to see the nature of that duality, the main trends and rules as well as the achievements, limitations and challenges in state management activities of vocational education.

## 3. Results and discussion

### 3.1. Establishing, separation and merging, changing vocational education management agencies - abashment in strategy and policy

The education system in Vietnam was established after the August Revolution in 1945. At the beginning of its establishment, vocational education was not included in the system. During the period from 1945 to 1954, perspectives and policies of vocational education were not established by the Government, although it had become a real need of the country. Some factories of the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam have deployed training for military workers to produce weapons (grenades, bombs, mines, SHZ, DKZ guns...).

After 1954, when the North was liberated and economic recovery policies were implemented, vocational training became even more necessary, but the Government had not yet

established viewpoints, guidelines and policies for vocational education domestically. To meet the need for technical human resources, the Government sends workers and students abroad for training under aid programs of a number of socialist countries (they are mostly the Soviet Union and China). In reality, sending training abroad cannot meet the needs of the economy. To solve difficulties, a number of ministries and branches have proactively opened training classes for technical workers to serve the State's manufacturing facilities.

At the end of 1960, Vietnam adopted the strategy to develop the North towards socialism, the Government of Vietnam issued the first 5-year socio-economic plan (1961-1965) with the goal of developing heavy industry preferentially, affirming that industry is the basis of the national economy. The industrial development policy poses a more urgent need for human resources with technical qualifications than ever before. To meet the needs of the economy, some ministries and branches strive to open training classes for technical workers to meet the needs of agencies and enterprises under the management of ministries and branches (Binh, 1990) <sup>[9]</sup>. Basically, vocational training in Vietnam does not have unified direction, fragmented development, and has a spontaneous appearance

In 1962, for the first time, the Government issued documents regulating vocational training. This is the first time since the establishment of the national education system that the Government expressed its view that the currently applied vocational education is no longer appropriate. This is the basis for the Prime Minister to issue a circular stipulating a number of necessary things for industries and localities that train workers and for apprentices. The Government's goal is to improve training and build a new force of workers with socialist enlightenment, professional abilities, have academic standard and good health to serve effectively for the construction of socialism. Accordingly, this circular also regulates standards and procedures for selecting apprentices, learning regimes, rights and obligations of learners. However, up to the present moment, the Government has not established or assigned tasks to any state agency to manage vocational education (Prime Minister's Office, 1962).

In 1964, the Government issued a circular regulating policies for vocational teachers. Accordingly, the circular regulates the selection of theory teachers, tutors, practical supervisor, duties and rights of teachers, tutors, practical supervisor. For the first time, the Government assigned the Ministry of Labor to be responsible for guiding the implementation of this document (Prime Minister, 1964).

Because sending students for training in socialist countries, even if expanded, cannot meet the need for technical workers in agencies and businesses. The training scale of domestic vocational schools must increase to meet requirements. The management of vocational schools requires a state management agency to organize direction unifiedly from central to local levels. Faced with that situation, in 1969 the Government issued a decree establishing the Directorate of Technical Training for worker, under the Ministry of Labor to manage vocational education (Government, 1969). Next, in March 1970, the Government Council issued a resolution on strengthening the training and fostering of technical workers. In this resolution, for the first time, the Government assessed Vietnam's vocational education: lacking foresight and advance preparation, without comprehensive planning; Slowly solving the necessary conditions for teaching and

learning; not respecting to fostering and improving the skills of workers right in production; slow promulgation or supplementation of necessary regimes and policies... Based on the assessment of those limitations, the Government sets out tasks, directions and measures to train and foster technical workers.

After 1975, when Vietnam was unified, when it discussed about the state apparatus, there was an opinion that the management of vocational training must be transferred to the Ministry of Tertiary, Professional Secondary because it is a training function. But there are also opinions that vocational training is still a task of the Ministry of Labor; on the other hand, labor management must not only manage quantity but also improve the quality of labor resources; If you want to improve the quality of labor, you must provide vocational training. The relative division of training was formed during the resistance war against the French colonialists. Training people who work mainly with their minds is provided by universities and professional secondary schools under the Ministry of Education, then the Ministry of Tertiary, Professional Secondary; training people to work mainly with their hands and operate machinery is carried out by technical training school for worker and factories under the state management of the Ministry of Labor. The Ministry of Education can hardly manage technical worker schools, factories, and cooperatives.

While the debate has not yet ended, the Government decided to separate the Directorate of Technical Training for Worker from the Ministry of Labor and change its name to the Directorate of Vocational Training, becoming an agency under the Government Council (Government Council, 1978a). With this decision, the Directorate of Vocational Training is the state agency to direct and manage unifiedly the entire of vocational training, including training and fostering vocational teachers, and disseminating vocational knowledge among the people according to the guidelines and policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam. The Directorate of Vocational Training is responsible for researching and submitting to the Government Council to decide on basic issues regarding directions, tasks, regulations, policies, regimes and plans in vocational training activities. The Directorate of Vocational Training is the agency managing vocational training, guiding professional knowledge, programs, content, and teaching methods for vocational schools; Guide and inspect recruitment work, student management; organize international cooperation activities in vocational training activities; Manage staff, payroll, funding and assets of vocational education institutions. The Directorate of Vocational Training is responsible to the Government Council (Government Council, 1978b).

By the 1981-1987 term, the Government apparatus became increasingly bloated and cumbersome (71 agencies, including 34 Ministries and ministry agencies, 37 Government agencies). The issue of downsizing the personnel and reducing management focal points is an urgent requirement. On February 16, 1987, the Government decided to merge The Directorate of Vocational Training into the Ministry of Tertiary, Professional Secondary and change its name to the Ministry of Tertiary, Professional Secondary and Vocational education (MTPSVE). The functional units of The Directorate of Vocational Training are integrated into the corresponding units of MTPSVE, leaving only the Department for Vocational Training and the Department for Vocational Teacher Training under the ministry, helping the

ministry with state management of vocational training. In 1988, the Department for Vocational Training and the Department for Vocational Teacher Training merged into the Department for Vocational Training. From an agency under the Government to a unit under a specialized ministry, the position and role of vocational education will also be affected and influenced to a certain extent. Mechanisms, policies, and human resource organization have all declined. However, the name of the governing ministry was also updated, adding responsibility for vocational education.

Merging the vocational education management unit into MTPSVE is also not the optimal solution for stability and development. Just three years later, on March 31, 1990, the Government Council issued a Resolution to establish the Ministry of Education and Training on the basis of the Ministry of Education; MTPSVE to manage state unifiedly of education and training (National Assembly, 1990). Implementing the resolution of the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers issued a decree regulating the functions, tasks, powers and organizational structure of the Ministry of Education and Training (1990). According to this decree, the state management of vocational education is merged with the management of professional secondary education, placed in the Department for Professional Secondary and Vocational Training.

From 1990 onwards, vocational education policies were merged with professional education policies. The relationship between professional education and vocational education is expressed in the Education Law (National Assembly, 1998). Accordingly, vocational education includes: 1) Secondary vocational education is carried out from three to four years for those with a secondary school diploma, from one to two years for those with a high school diploma; 2) Vocational training for people with educational and health qualifications suitable for the profession to be studied; implemented in less than one year for short-term vocational training programs, from one to three years for long-term vocational training programs. Vocational education establishments include: professional secondary schools and vocational schools, vocational training centers, vocational training classes.

The perspective of integrating professional education and vocational education continues to be expressed in the Education Law (National Assembly, 2005). All vocational education activities are still in charge of the Department for Professional Secondary and Vocational Training. During the first 10 years of the 21st century, the direction of vocational education development has changed. In 2001, the Government approved the "Education Development Strategy 2001 - 2010". In 2002, the Government approved the Vocational Training school network planning for the period 2002-2010. In 2004, the National Assembly issued a resolution on education and training, emphasizing "strongly developing vocational education, implementing streaming post-secondary and transfer within the education system, creating favorable conditions for young people choose many forms of study and after completing secondary school and high school, students have the opportunity to learn a profession."

The above viewpoints and policies show that state management agencies have recognized the position and role and at the same time made efforts to innovate thinking and vision for vocational education. However, these policy correction efforts are not enough to enable vocational

education to develop and meet practical needs. Comprehensive reform of state management work towards clearly assigning and decentralizing the responsibilities and powers of the Ministry of Education and Training, ministries, and sectors, authorities... are still just wishes, suggestions, striving... but there cannot be any effective solutions to meet practical needs.

### **3.2. Institutionalize the law, continue to transform state management agencies on vocational education-challenges still remain**

In 2014, the Vocational Education Law was promulgated (National Assembly, 2014). This is one of the efforts to institutionalize the State's policies, perspectives, and solutions for vocational education. For the first time after many years of designing the national education system, vocational education has a legal framework regulating the position and function of vocational education; organization and operation of vocational education institutions; rights and obligations of organizations and individuals participating in vocational education activities. The Vocational Education Law applies to vocational education centers, intermediate schools, and colleges; businesses and agencies, organizations and individuals related to vocational education activities in Vietnam.

The Vocational Education Law also defines the goals of Vietnamese vocational education. Accordingly, the general goal of vocational education is to train human resources directly for production, business and services, with practical capacity corresponding to the training level; have ethics and health; have professional responsibility; have the ability to be creative and adapt to the working environment in the context of international integration; ensuring improved productivity and labor quality; create conditions for learners after completing the course to be able to find a job, create their own job or study for a higher level.

The Vocational Education Law was promulgated, for the first time Vietnam had a fairly precise definition of the type of vocational education; State policies on vocational education development; the issue of socialization of vocational education; the issue of planning the network of vocational education institutions; organizational structure of vocational education institutions... In particular, this document clearly stipulates the State's policies towards vocational education institutions; including policies on land, finance, and property; international cooperation issues; clearly stipulate the content, training programs and diplomas; the rights of businesses in vocational education activities; rights, obligations and responsibilities of teachers and learners; the issue of testing the quality of vocational education...

A notable highlight of The Vocational Education Law is that it has brought the concept of vocational education in Vietnam closer to commonly used international terminology. In the world today, the terms: Vocational Education and Training (VET) or "Technical Vocational Education and Training" (TVET), Vocational Education Law are often used. Countries that use the name Vocational Education Law are quite popular such as: China, Indonesia, Philippines, Latvia, Areland.

It can be affirmed that The Vocational Education Law (2014) has institutionalized many important issues. Vietnamese experts assess that this is a law that has strongly institutionalized the policy of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education in general and

vocational education in particular in the spirit of the 8th Conference Resolution, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (Session XI); This law has resolved many shortcomings in practice, creating a new look for the vocational education system in Vietnam, meeting the requirements of integration with regional and international countries.

However, although the legislation are quite comprehensive, state management of vocational education - which has been a long - standing bottleneck - has not been thoroughly resolved. Regulations on State management of vocational education in this law are still very general words and concepts, it is unclear which unit is responsible, such as: central state management agencies and local state management agencies; Ministries and ministerial agencies coordinate with state management agencies; People's Committee within the scope of its powers and duties.... These issues are not only unclear but also quite vague. For example, "The Government unifies state management of vocational education; The central state management agency for vocational education is responsible before the Government for implementing state management of vocational education; Ministries and ministerial agencies coordinate with the central state management agency on vocational education to carry out state management of vocational education according to their authority and directly manage the vocational education establishments of the ministries, sectors (if any) according to assigned functions and tasks (National Assembly, 2014).

After 3 years of promulgation of The Vocational Education Law, vocational education activities have not been able to break through. Faced with that situation, in 2016, the Government decided to assign the task of state management of vocational education back to the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs. The Government's regular meeting resolution in August 2016 "agreed to assign the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs to be the state management agency on vocational education". The Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs coordinates with ministries and direct management agencies of intermediate schools and colleges to urgently direct the implementation of autonomy in the system of vocational education institutions to quickly reduce administrative intervention of the Regulatory agency and the Provincial People's Committee.

In November 2016, the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs conducted the handover ceremony of State management functions on vocational education. Accordingly, from January 1, 2017, the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs will implement state management of the entire vocational education sector (Government, 2016).

Since January 1, 2017, the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs has implemented state management of the entire vocational education sector. The Directorate of Vocational Training under the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs was renamed as The Directorate of Vocational Education. Accordingly, The Directorate of Vocational Education has the position and function of advising and assisting the Minister of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs in state management and organizing enforcement the law on vocational education throughout the country; Manage and implement public services on vocational education under its authority according to the provisions of law. According to the Prime Minister's decision (2017), regulating the functions, tasks, powers and

organizational structure of the Directorate of Vocational Training, the Directorate is assigned up to 22 tasks and powers. Among these tasks and powers, there are a number of notable points including: 1) Promulgate according to authority professional and professional knowledge guidance documents on vocational education within the scope of state management of the Directorate; 2) Manage vocational education levels of the national qualifications framework; refer to vocational education levels with the ASEAN Regional Qualifications Reference Framework and with other national qualifications frameworks; 3) Formal training management includes: industry list, amount of knowledge; process of developing and promulgating training programs; monitor the organization to implement of training programs; Guide vocational education institutions to compile, select, evaluate, approve and use training programs and textbooks. The transfer of state management tasks for vocational education from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs also sets up a "transition stage" to resolve difficulties and challenges. For colleges, because they belong to the university education system, their goals, training programs, and standards for lecturers are very different from vocational colleges. Therefore, there needs to be a transition stage for teachers and students to feel secure before implementing the new training program under the vocational education system. Regarding enrollment, the Ministry of Education and Training continues to resolve issues related to student enrollment at secondary schools and professional intermediate schools in 2016. From 2017, Colleges and professional intermediate schools will enroll students according to regulations issued by the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs in accordance with the Vocational Education Law. Regarding training, college students enrolled in the course in 2016 or earlier can continue to study the current college program until the end of the course and will be awarded college diploma according to the regulations of the Ministry of Education and Training. Students enrolled from the course in 2017 onwards study according to the new program of the Ministry of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs, granting college degrees in vocational education. Regarding transfer from professional intermediate school to college or university, students of professional intermediate school, high school, enrolled from 2016 or earlier, if they meet the conditions according to current regulations, will be allowed for continuing to study at university. The Ministry of Education and Training will adjust the transfer criteria of universities to be able to enroll transferring training in professional intermediate training, colleges and universities for these subjects. Transferring training for vocational education students recruited from 2017 onwards will be implemented according to the new decision of the Prime Minister.

#### 4. Conclusion

During 80 years of building and developing Vietnam's education system (1945-2024), the issue of vocational education has been raised as an essential need of the economy and society in all historical periods. The Vietnamese State has paid attention and wished to develop vocational education that is pragmatic and meets the needs of businesses, economic and social organizations. From the Government Council (1960-1980), the Council of Ministers (1980-1992) to the Government (1992 until now), there have been many times to direct, improve and innovate vocational education.

However, in State management, changes, splits, and mergers are still not enough to enable vocational education to develop. State management policies and capacity always appear passive in the face of practical requirements. The name of Vietnamese vocational education for a long time was not close to the names of this type of education in countries around the world. Concepts such as vocational training, technical worker training, professional education... do not correspond to the nature of this type of education. Inaccurate identification of the nature of vocational education leads to inappropriate management perspectives and policies. The development process of vocational education institutions depends on policy and management capacity. If the policy is consistent with reality and organize implementing seriously, flexibly and creatively, the system of vocational education institutions will develop and the quality of training will be improved.

Vocational education is a part of educational science, containing many difficult issues that are of concern to the whole society. To resolve difficulties and inadequacies in state management activities, many solutions must be implemented synchronously. Each solution affects one stage, one link in the system. To improve the quality and effectiveness of vocational training to meet the requirements of the labor market in the current context, it is necessary to innovate state management and more specifically define the position, tasks and functions of the state management agency for vocational education. State management of vocational education must ensure that it is a powerful activity, carried out by competent state agencies, commanding and operating to exercise state power.

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