

Education Service and the Market Demand

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After 20 years of economic reform, Vietnam has made good progress in various fields, which is appreciated by the international community, especially when it became a member of the WTO and UN Security Council. At present, however, Vietnam is facing many challenges. In addition, the IT boom allows nationals, including ones in remote and depressed regions, to get more information about domestic and international affairs, and as a result, the demand for a better education service is on the increase and learning becomes one of basic skills of the public. Ability to learn and adopt new things quickly has become a means for securing better prospects of employment and income. The public want to develop extensively and intensively their knowledge, skills and behavior needed for their social life and work. The market economy allows the private sector to grow faster and all kinds of companies come into being. They need various skills and knowledge from their employees in such fields as marketing, financial control and business management. This means that the education system should try its best to meet the market demand. What are contents of the social demand for education?

According to the report to the national conference "Education Service and Market Demand," this social demand is a broad concept but many experts agree that its contents comprise three groups of basic needs:

- The State wants a long-term strategy that ensures smooth development for the country. Its demand usually aims at seeking short cuts to technological and scientific advances and training experts in biology, electronic engineering, aviation, atomic energy and some other key technologies.

- Companies and other organizations need managers and skilled laborers and they want graduates to do their jobs up to their expectations. Their needs could be met by graduates in applied sciences, technicians of medium and advanced levels and learners from vocational schools.

- Students also need good education for employment and their parents also want them to be well educated and tend to orient them towards traditional professions of the family.

In the said conference, many educators wonder how to train their students according to requirements by companies. Dr. Thái Bá Cần from HCMC Technical Education University said that it's hard to satisfy demand of each company, so universities could only train students up to some standards in

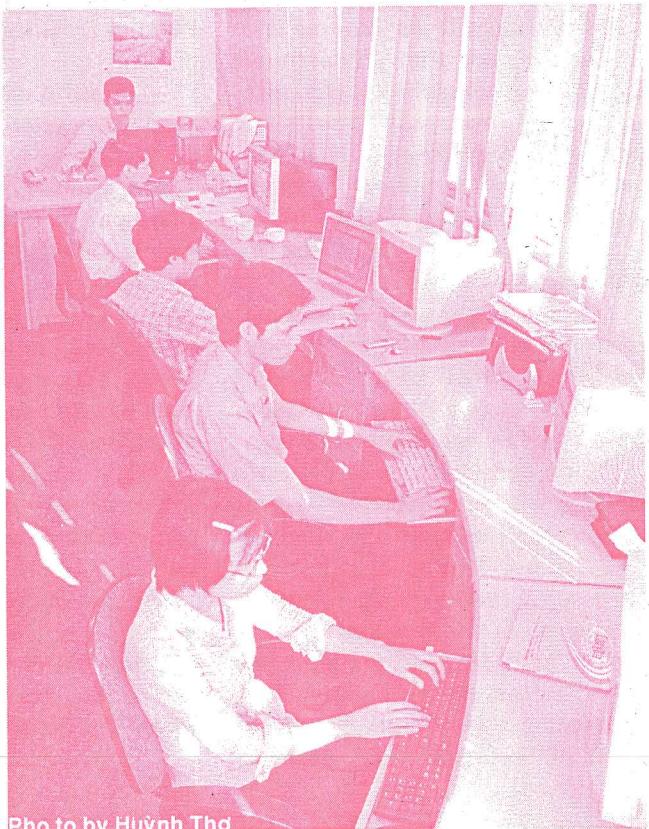


Photo by Huỳnh Thảo

knowledge, skills and behavior. Are these need satisfied and is supply equal to demand when some 200,000 students graduate every year?

It is not a small number but why do companies keep looking for skilled laborers? The shortage of well-trained and competent laborers forces local companies to seek for help from professional head hunters or recruit foreign technicians. Only a small number out of 200,000 graduates from local universities and colleges meet standards set by recruiters. Training programs in most local schools pay too much attention to theories instead of practice with the result that most of their graduates lack necessary skills, especially creativity, teamwork spirit and efficiency-oriented behavior. In the workshop on human resource development for companies' requirements held in HCMC on Oct. 28, 2007, the Director-General of Nhà Bè Garment Company said, "My company spent VND3 billion in 2007 training some 1,900 employees but only 30% of them are up to their jobs. In recent years, my companies has started recruiting graduates from colleges and technical high schools but they can only undertake minor tasks after 3- or 6-month training courses. Graduates from University of Foreign Trade don't know how to make customs declarations or draft

business contracts." The lack of necessary skills is common among graduates from any colleges and they have to work as apprentices before getting full employment. This means more costs and loss of time for companies.

Conversations with new graduates show that most of them have no chance to do any job or undertake any tasks relating to the main subjects at school. They have to learn practical skills from friends, co-workers and superiors after getting employed. They have spent too much time on studying such subjects as Marxism, political economics, history of the VCP, and sociology with the result that the time for their main subjects becomes shorter. Another problem with them is their work ethic and behavior. Although they have sufficient knowledge and skills, their lack of proper work ethic makes companies reluctant to promote them to higher positions.

Discussing why the education service fails to meet the market demand, Minister of Education said, "We are in a vicious circle. Our country is poor and the fund for education is small, so the service quality is not good enough to meet requirements posed by companies, which hinders the economic growth and leads to shortage of fund for the education and scientific research."

According to statistics supplied by the Ministry of Education and Training, only 30% of candidates get admission to colleges and technical high schools every year. Some top colleges take top candidates. Their monopolistic position limits the awareness of education as required by the society. These colleges train according to their programs without paying attention to needs of employers. In other words, they sell what they have, not what buyers need.

Lack of input information and prediction of the social needs makes the education service unable to meet the market demand. The education service and companies are like two parallel lines and they never meet.

Teaching staff is also a problem. The number of professors is very small. Statistics in 2005 show that only 14.42% of teachers in colleges had doctorates; 32.73% were Masters; 48.66% were Bachelors; 1.84% graduated from 3-year colleges and 2.34% had other degrees. In 2006, the Ministry of Education and Training said 12.43% of lecturers were Doctors and this figure in 2007 reduced to 9.958% (5,192 out of 52,129). This figure is much lower than the target of 25% set for 2010 and the figure of 60% or 70% found in developed countries. The percentage becomes lower because the number of retired doctors is bigger than that of new ones. In addition, many doctors don't want to teach in colleges because of low salary. At present, many universities

have invited top graduates to work as assistants or teachers. It's hard for these graduates to do well their jobs because they lack knowledge of teaching methods and practical experience. As for experienced professors, they tend to work as visiting professors in many colleges in order to increase their income with the result that they have no time for scientific research. Many people joke that professors today run around colleges like singers around nightclubs when many colleges and training centers mushroom and there are no rule against their operation.

Training programs of most colleges are not suited to the market demand. New colleges tend to apply programs imported from others instead of working out new programs in order to find market niches. Existence of too many kinds of training centers and colleges with different standards and degrees makes it difficult for the state control over the education service. This situation is also a cause of difference between the education service and the market demand.

At present, there is no supply of information about the labor market of the national level with a view to helping learners to select right subjects and colleges for them. Many graduates can't find appropriate jobs after graduation and too many candidates go to faculties that have almost no prospects for employment. This situation leads to both surplus and deficit: surplus of graduates in some fields and deficit in others. For example, colleges of pedagogy have once found it difficult to attract candidates and students when average income for teachers was very low under the centrally-planned mechanism. When the shortage of teachers became alarming, various kinds of preferential treatment were offered to students of the colleges making the number of candidates skyrocket, and as a result, many graduates from these colleges are now out of jobs.

One of urgent problems with graduates is the lack of knowledge of foreign languages. This shortcoming prevents them from getting employed. Many students are from poor provinces and they have to do part-time jobs in order to pay for tuition, accommodation and food. They can't afford money for books and scientific researches while libraries in colleges can't supply enough books and material. They also face many other difficulties that I can't name here.

To deal with the above-mentioned problems, there must be a close cooperation between the education authorities, companies and colleges. Regrettably, there is no national strategy to build it and each party still make its efforts in vain to improve the situation. ■