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HUMAN RESOURCE PLANNING REFORMS IN SOUTH KOREA: IMPLICATIONS FOR HO CHI MINH CITY*

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Received: 17/05/2022; Revised: 06/07/2022; Accepted: 05/8/2022

Abstract

Human resource had inevitably been a key factor in contributing to South Korea's high technology boom and rapid economic growth. Sharing similarities in historical situation, social and economic condition, lessons from what South Korean government had implemented to develop skilled manpower that meets economic development needs would be valuable for Vietnam situation in general and Ho Chi Minh City in particular. Firstly, this study clarified the reciprocal relation of education, human resource and economic development. Then, it focused on analyzing and finding out effective policies in human resource development of Ho Chi Minh City from South Korea's case study.

Key words: *human resource planning, higher education, education development, economic growth*

1. Introduction

South Korea is known as the special phenomenon in the world due to its high technology boom and rapid economic development called "Miracle on the Han river". Becoming one of the leading industrialized countries with possessing poor natural resources and suffering post war economic problems, human resource has inevitably been a key factor in contributing to this development. Specifically, education is the major part that helped South Korea in forming a high-quality manpower to meet the demands of economic growth (Huong, 2020: 1).

Vietnam now is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world with GDP growth rate in 2018 and 2019 were 7.1% and 7.02% respectively (World Bank,

2021). Vietnam was shifted from the centrally planned subsidized economy to the socialist-oriented market economy but it is still a developing country that belongs to the group of lower middle-income economies (Socialist Republic of Vietnam Government Portal, 2021). Hence, Vietnam has strived to find ways to develop all sectors of the economy. Undoubtedly, human capital development plays a critical role in building a well-educated people responding to requirements of the modernization and industrialization process. Vietnam has recently concentrated on developing key economic zones, in which, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is the most populous city in Vietnam, located in the Southern. It is also considered as the leading economic engine of Vietnam. The

City has an average annual growth rate reached to 7.22% from 2016 to 2019. The average per-person income in 2019 increased to US\$ 6,400 that was more than two times in comparison with the national average level¹. Consequently, economic development in Ho Chi Minh City is believed to be a lever to motivate and push the speed of economic growth in the whole country.

Sharing similarities in historical situation, social and economic condition, lessons from what South Korean government has implemented to develop a high-quality manpower that meets economic development would be valuable for Vietnam situation in general and Ho Chi Minh City in particular. This study aims at clarifying the reciprocal relation of education, human resource and economic development. Then, it focuses on analyzing and finding out effective policies in human resource development of Ho Chi Minh City from South Korea's case study.

This study approaches from a qualitative perspective through reviewing, synthesizing and analyzing the collected materials. Specifically, the secondary data is extracted from a series of previous articles that link the role of human resource to economic growth, education planning reforms in South Korea and Vietnam and originated chiefly on the World Bank database (<https://data.worldbank.org>) and General Statistic Office of Vietnam (<https://www.gso.gov.vn>). Also, this study would concentrate on key renovation in education development in South Korea to

discover lessons for Vietnam situation, especially in the higher education area which is considered as the main factor in building a high-skilled workforce.

2. Education, human resource and economic development

It is the fact that education is one of the basic components of development. One country could not reach the sustainable economic growth if its government does not make a sufficient investment in improving human resources. Education shows the ways that help individuals learn more about themselves and surrounded world. It makes life better through enhancing the quality of life, bringing more social benefits and advances in science and technology as well as promoting economic development (Ozturk, 2001).

In addition, education could produce positive influences on economic expansion. It could create the high-quality human capital participating in the transition process from the labor-based economy to knowledge-based economy. It forms a learning environment where technicians, engineers and specialists could have chances to access new technologies (Huong, 2020: 17). Also, education is considered as a driving force of the economic growth. It plays an important role in determining culture characteristics, moral norms, attitudes of the labor force as well as transferring knowledge and technology. Consequently, education contributes on increasing employment opportunities (Huong, 2020: 18).

In particular, among education levels,

¹ Nhân Dân Online (2020). *Ho Chi Minh City strives to maintain role as Vietnam's economic engine*. <https://en.nhandan.vn/ho-chi-minh-city->

[strives-to-maintain-role-as-vietnams-economic-engine-post90972.html](https://en.nhandan.vn/ho-chi-minh-city-strives-to-maintain-role-as-vietnams-economic-engine-post90972.html), Accessed March 27, 2021.

higher education keeps a leading position in generating a well-educated workforce. People who have successfully completed a three-, four- or five-year college program at universities or colleges could show ethical behaviors and get new modern scientific knowledge and technology better and faster than others who did not take the same level of education (Nelson and Phelps, 1966). Besides, higher education proves its contribution on economic development by engaging the procedure of forming, delivering and transferring knowledge. In which, the knowledge formation is implemented at universities by developing scientific research of professors, lectures and excellent students. Performance evaluation is counted by the number of research articles published in the international journals. Then, knowledge delivering is presented through research services agreement signed by universities and companies. Finally, knowledge transfer

activities are expressed by teaching at higher education institutions (Becker and Lewis, 1993).

Generally, the mutual correlation between higher education and economic development is clarified through upgrading human capital. Economic growth gives more working chances in job market for people who graduated from universities. Additionally, it could boost investment in higher education by supplying more modern material facilities and strengthening higher education network in both of quantity and quality. In turn, higher education sector has a remarkable influence on the economy. The renovation and enhancement in higher education could create high-qualified human resources that could learn new technology and adapt to dynamic work environment, therefore, promote economic development (Shin, 2012). This relation could be presented in the Figure 1 below.

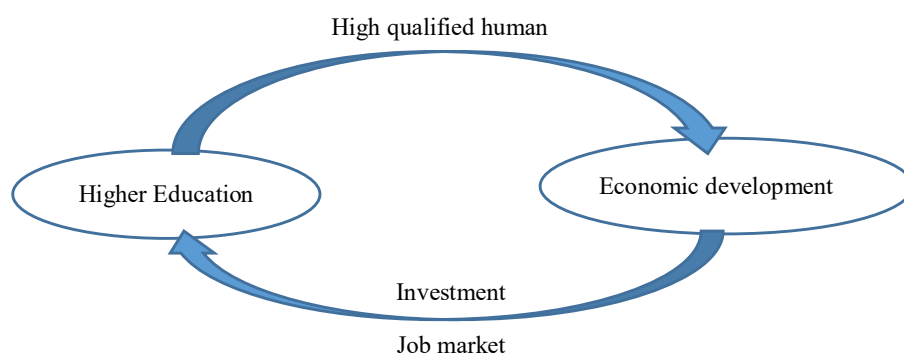


Figure 1. The reciprocal relation between higher education and economic development (Shin, 2012)

3. Human resource planning reforms in South Korea

Overview of education development and human capital improvement in each stage of economic growth of South Korea

The following figure shows the overall procedure of education development and labor force enhancement in each stage of economic growth of South Korea:

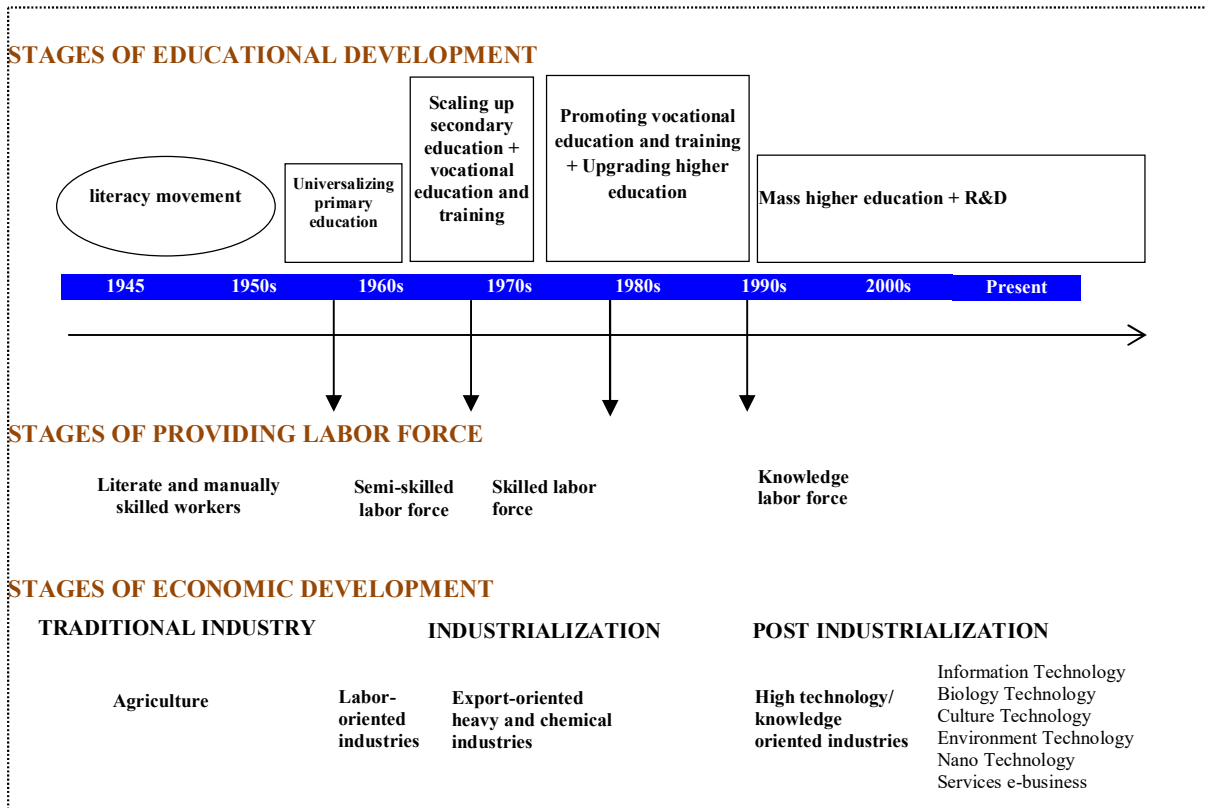


Figure 2. The overall process of educational development and human capital improvement in each stage of economic growth of South Korea (Huong, 2020: 55)

Key Strategies of Educational Development in South Korea

In each stage of economic growth, educational development is aimed at generating workforce that meets the

demands of the economy. This process has followed three key principles involving systematic, step-by-step and sequential approaches (KEDI, 2017: 18) (Figure 3).

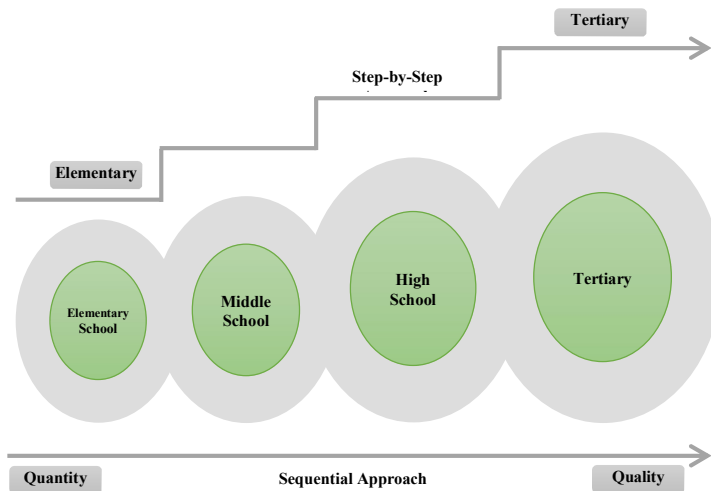


Figure 3. Education for the Future (KEDI, 2016: 9; cited in KEDI, 2017: 21)

Systematic Feature

This feature is related to forming the process of producing education policies, then executing these policies and finally, evaluating the achieved performance (KEDI, 2017: 18).

Step-by-Step Procedure

The South Korean government advocated intensifying each education level at a time. Firstly, primary education improvement was universalized to set down strong foundation for education system from 1945 to 1960s. This policy could supply people who could work in the labor-oriented industries to the labor market (KEDI, 2017: 19-20).

Secondly, secondary education and vocational education and training were scaled up from 1960s to mid-1970s to provide workers who acquired basic skills to work in export-oriented light industries (clothing, textile, toys, wigs, etc.), consumer electronic item production (televisions, radios, etc.) and the early stage of heavy industries (ship, steel, etc.) (Kim, 2002: 31; Park et al., 2015: 7-9).

Next, the government concentrated on promoting vocational and upgrading the higher education from mid-1970s and 1980s to create the workforce that could respond to the requirements about knowledge application and practice skills in systematic refinement of heavy industries. Also, the transition of economy in 1980s from “duplicative imitation” to “creative imitation” and “innovation” that led to the emergence of electronic products such as computers, semiconductors, electric switching systems, etc. (Kim, 2002: 31;

Park et al., 2015: 7-9).

Furthermore, the 1990s - the present period witnessed the mass higher education era of South Korea. People could get more job opportunities in the global market but they have to deal with the increasing global competition and challenges in accessing new technologies. They need to be equipped with knowledge, skills and competence to adapt to the economy that has been changed to a knowledge based-economy. Accordingly, research and development activities and university-enterprises cooperation have been raised (KEDI, 2017: 19-20).

Sequential Approach

The process of education expansion in South Korea is a sequential development approach implemented from quantitative to qualitative. To begin with primary education level, the government gave priority to learners who could get admission easily. Nevertheless, this policy could lead to the fact that there were so many people in each class. Then, the government spent more money on building new schools to deal with this situation and hence, the quality of primary education was strengthened (KEDI, 2017: 20).

Also, at the secondary education, the government focused on rising the number of secondary schools before improving the education quality. Specially, they encouraged and allowed for diversifying funding sources including not only public funds but also private funds to build secondary schools (KEDI, 2017: 20).

In the same way, at first higher education was heightened in quantitative

aspect through producing more chances for people who want to study at universities or colleges. Then, the government supported scientific research activities at higher education institutions by carrying out national projects (KEDI, 2017: 20-21). Among them, three most important projects considered as three pillars in the higher education reformation

in South Korea were as follows: Brain Korea 21 Project concentrated on improving Research and Development; Leaders in Industry-University Cooperation Project focused on revising Technical Education and Advancement of College Education Project directed at reorganizing teaching activities (Park et al., 2015: 19) (Figure 4).

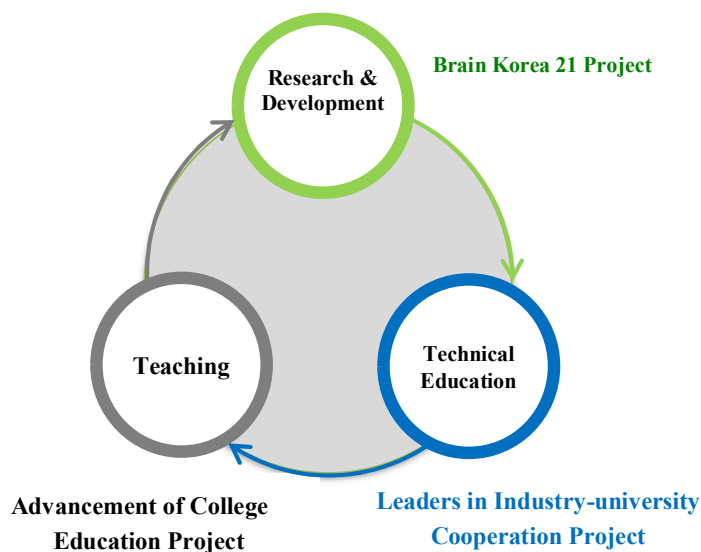


Figure 4. Three Pillars of the Higher Education Reformation in South Korea (Park et al., 2015: 19)

4. Lessons for Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Vietnam and South Korea have similarities and differences in historical,

social and economic condition. The following table shows the historical review for economic growth in South Korea and Vietnam from 1945 to the present.

Table 1. Historical Review for Economic Development: South Korea and Vietnam

Timeline	World context	South Korea	Vietnam
1945	Surrender of Japan in Asia and the end of World War II/ Establishing United Nations	Surrender of Japan Korea was divided into North and South	Establishment of Democratic Republic of Vietnam/ French Colony return

Timeline	World context	South Korea	Vietnam	
1946	THE COLD WAR			
1950				
1953		Korean War	Indochina War	
1954		Recovery after the war with US assistance		
1960s		- Starting President Park Chung-Hee period - Starting the rapid economic growth period: 1962-1971: labor-intensive and export-oriented economic strategies in light industries and consumer electronic products	Vietnam War (Division of North and South after the end of Indochina War)	
1970s		-1972-1976: heavy industries and chemical industries - Late 1970s: systematic modification in heavy industries - End of President Park Chung-Hee period		
1975			Country reunification	
1980s			- Centrally-planned economy - “Đổi mới” policy 1986 (Reformation policy) - Transformation from a highly centralized command economy to a mixed economy	
1991			Collapse of the USSR - The End of the Cold War	
1990s		Asian Financial Crisis (1997)	- Join WTO in 1995 - Focusing on high-tech industries - Early 1990s: diversified and dynamic economy	- Economic transformation period - Increasing export - Gradually join global economic cooperation and

Timeline	World context	South Korea	Vietnam
2000s to present		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mid 1990s: knowledge-intensive economy - Totally moved toward market-oriented economy - Advances in high-tech industries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organizations - Join WTO in 2007 - Integrated into the global economy - Expanded in agriculture and foreign investment - Developed tourist industry - Perfecting the industry along with the global supply chains - Utilizing information technology to catch up with development

Source: (Huong, 2020: 34-36)

In particular, Ho Chi Minh City has gone through the recovery stage after the war in 1975. At that time, Vietnam conducted the same policies with South Korea in increasing the speed of the literacy movement. Also, Vietnam made an effort in reducing the educational differences between the two regions, then unifying the national education system followed the Northern system (Huong, 2020: 103). Therefore, educational policies in Ho Chi Minh City were changed to adapt to this new education system.

Next, Ho Chi Minh City prepared human capital that responds to the industrialization process. In the early days of reunification, the number of people who finished primary education and secondary education levels studying at higher education level was still low. The “Đổi mới” Policy in 1986 generated positive changes in all aspects of society including education development. From 1990s, rapid

economic growth led to raising the demand for highly-skilled workforce that needed to be educated at higher education institutions. However, education programs exposed differences with international criterion in terms of content, methods as well as evaluation (Huong, 2020: 104).

At the present, economic development in Ho Chi Minh City is still based on cheap labor force rather than knowledge - based human resource as South Korea. Along with the information from the above Table 1, in terms of human capital, Ho Chi Minh City’s circumstance is undoubtedly same with South Korea situation at 1980s and 1990s (Huong, 2020: 34-36, 107). Therefore, Ho Chi Minh City’s government could apply key strategies that South Korea implemented in their educational development in building high-qualified manpower. Ho Chi Minh City should develop education in all levels based on three principles involving systematic, step

by step and sequential approaches. Noticeably, Ho Chi Minh City has to focus on improving higher education sector that is evaluated as a fundamental factor to help Ho Chi Minh people could quickly reduce the gap in qualifications of human resources with other countries in the regions. The important policies that Ho Chi Minh City's government and people should consider are as follows:

Education development must be a top priority. A learning society should be formed.

Defining a rational process of forming education policies, then conducting and examining the achieved results. Ho Chi Minh City's government should take the initiative in organizing independent scientific research centers that could support the evaluation process.

Within limited financial budgets, Ho Chi Minh could not improve all of education levels at the same time, but they need to develop education step by step and focus on quantitative aspect before promoting the quality of education. Ho Chi Minh City's government should ask more autonomy from the national government in building and spending budgets for education.

At primary education level, it is compulsory for everyone and thus, the City authorities should pay more money on constructing schools to decrease the number of students in each class. At secondary schools, the private investment should be stimulated.

In particular, mass higher education should be pushed by attracting all of private and public funds. Also, administration mechanism should be adjusted to speed up international universities open new

branches in Ho Chi Minh City. This mass higher education policy will give people more chances to enter universities. Then, scientific research must be strongly paid attention at universities because it could create breakthrough in acquiring and discovering new technologies. The City's government should create projects that support selected universities to strengthen scientific research, reinforce the university-enterprises relationship and diversify teaching activities.

Additionally, the City authorities should mark the following notes in higher education improvement:

Education programs at higher education institutions need to be designed in accordance with the education accreditation standards of the Minister of Education and Training.

Promoting international cooperation between higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh City and other countries in regions and the World such as organizing international conferences, student exchange programs, language programs or cultural exchange activities, etc. Specially, South Korea is one of the top investors in Vietnam. There are more and more Korean companies running their business in Ho Chi Minh City and thus, education cooperation with South Korea should be enhanced. Huge corporations like Samsung, LG and Lotte, etc. provide us an enormous amount of works so that we need to generate well-educated labors who could be able to work for them.

Innovating higher education management, giving more autonomy to universities.

- Establishing good conditions and modern facilities to appeal talent workforce

at other countries and Vietnamese studying abroad to work at higher-education institutions.

5. Conclusion

In general, education, human resource and economic development interact to each other. Education development could supply high-qualified manpower that plays a key role in developing the economy. In converse, economic development could make investment in improving education and create more work opportunities in the job market. Through discovering the success story of South Korea in nurturing effective human capital for economic growth, important lessons could be withdrawn for Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It would be suitable in Ho Chi Minh City situation if the City's government applies systematic, step by step and sequential approaches in education development. Particularly, Ho Chi Minh City should pay much attention on upgrading higher education to catch up new technologies and create well-educated human capital that could be able work in the global market.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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