

VIETNAM–JAPAN HIGHER-EDUCATION COOPERATION IN THE FIRST TWO DECADES OF THE 21ST CENTURY¹

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Abstract: Since diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Japan were officially established in September 1973, the relationship between the two countries has increasingly expanded and enabled outstanding achievements in many aspects of economy, socio-culture, science, and technology, especially in education and training. At the higher-education level, the two governments have been promoting cooperation programs and projects such as transnational education exchange of students and lecturers. Additionally, Japan offers more than one hundred scholarships yearly to Vietnamese undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students to study and research in Japan. These projects have significantly contributed to improving the quality of Vietnam's higher education, helping Vietnam to train high-quality human resources for the country's industrialization and modernization. In order to further stimulate higher-education cooperation between the two countries, however, it is necessary to examine what has been accomplished so far and what problems remain to propose recommendations that might enhance education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan in the coming years. This study aims to briefly introduce the basis of higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan. It also seeks to analyze and assess the current situation and policy and achievements and challenges of higher-education cooperation between the two countries over the past 20 years. Thenceforth, it proposes several recommendations for further strengthening higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan in the coming years.

Keywords: International relations, educational cooperation, higher education

INTRODUCTION

After nearly five decades of establishing official diplomatic relations, the relationship between Vietnam and Japan has expanded and achieved outstanding achievements in many aspects of the economy, society and culture, science and technology, security, defense, and especially the fields of education and training. In the current context, ASEAN countries, including Vietnam, are becoming the top platform of big countries like Japan, and education has always been the leading attractive field in Japan's foreign relations with ASEAN countries. Along with developing the cooperative relationship between the two countries, research works on this relationship have also been made and published in all fields of cooperation. When examining higher-education cooperation between

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Vietnam and Japan, however, previous authors often integrate it in the cultural cooperation or the overall picture of the relationship between the two countries. So far, there have not been many intensive studies on higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan. Therefore, through examining Vietnam–Japan higher-education cooperation, we will have a more specific picture of an attractive aspect of Vietnam–Japan relations. It is possible to summarize the achievements of the relationship between Vietnam and Japan over the years to see how both Vietnam and Japan have constantly made efforts to bring education cooperation between the two countries to a new height.

The objective of this study is to examine the situation of higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan over the years, achievements as well as challenges to provide recommendations for further strengthening higher-education cooperation between the two countries in the future. To fulfill this purpose, the study begins by outlining the basis of higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan. The next section analyzes the situation of higher-education cooperation between the two countries. This section explores policies of higher-education cooperation of Vietnam and Japan, and then it tries to analyze the achievements as well challenges in cooperating higher education between Vietnam and Japan; thenceforth, the study provides concluding remarks and recommendations in the last section.

THE BASIS OF HIGHER-EDUCATION COOPERATION BETWEEN VIETNAM AND JAPAN

Overview of Vietnam–Japan relations

The relationship between Vietnam and Japan can be divided into three periods. The first period from the ancient times to the 19th century, the second period lasted from the 19th century to 1973, and the third period from the two countries established diplomatic relations on September 21, 1973. After establishing diplomatic relations, the Japanese government has implemented following its well-known diplomatic approach, the so-called Fukuda Doctrine, toward a heart-to-heart relationship. Japan plays a bridging role, actively contributing to maintaining peace and stability in Southeast Asia. In November 1992, Japan resumed its ODA to Vietnam, and since then, Japan has continuously been the biggest ODA provider to Vietnam.³ Vietnam has an important position geographically and diplomatically for Japan and is the third most populous country in Southeast Asia. Therefore, supporting Vietnam’s reconstruction and economic growth has been Japan’s mission. Japan has adopted an approach based on three economic pillars, including trade, investment, and ODA to support Vietnam in developing infrastructures such as roads, railways, power plants, and ports, attracting foreign direct investment, and creating employment opportunities with the collaboration of the public and private sectors.⁴ As of 2013, Japan had supported Vietnam to renovate and build 3,309 km of roads and 287 bridges from its ODA. Moreover, the country has helped Vietnam build 650 km of national road and about 70% of the total length of Vietnam’s four-lane national highways.⁵ Between 2014 and 2018, Japan granted approximately US\$280 million in ODA to assist infrastructure development, human resource management, and environmental and governance practices in Vietnam.⁶

³ Anh Nguyen, “Japanese-funded transport projects answer Vietnam’s growth demand”, *Vietnam+*, Wednesday, September 19, 2018, <<https://en.vietnamplus.vn/japanesefunded-transport-projects-answer-vietnams-growth-demand/142321.vnp>>.

⁴ JICA, “Japan-Vietnam partnership to date and from now on: Connecting people and nations toward regional peace and stability”, <https://www.jica.go.jp/vietnam/office/others/pamphlet/ku57pq0000221kma-att/Japan_Vietnam_Partnership_To_Date_and_From_Now_On_en.pdf>, p. 5.

⁵ Anh Nguyen, “Japanese-funded transport projects answer Vietnam’s growth demand”, *Vietnam+*, Wednesday, September 19, 2018, <<https://en.vietnamplus.vn/japanesefunded-transport-projects-answer-vietnams-growth-demand/142321.vnp>>.

⁶ Xuan-Dung Phan, “How Abe’s diplomatic activism elevated Vietnam-Japan ties”, *East Asia Forum*, September 26, 2020, <<https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2020/09/26/how-abes-diplomatic-activism-elevated-vietnam-japan-ties/>>.

Over the years, Japan has always been the third-largest economic partner in Vietnam. The country is currently Vietnam's third-largest export market (after the US and China) and the third-largest import market (after ASEAN and the EU). Between January and September 2020, Japan became the fourth largest commercial partner of Vietnam, with a two-way trade turnover that reached US\$28.6 billion. In the first three quarters of 2020, Japan was Vietnam's second-biggest investor with US\$1.73 billion. As of September 2020, Japan had invested in about 4,600 FDI projects in Vietnam with a total registered capital of about US\$60 billion.⁷ As a country with advanced and modern science and technology strength, Japan's FDI has made a positive contribution to Vietnam's economic transition towards industrialization and modernization through technology transfer and management skills.

The two countries have become very important partners and have shared many common strategic interests. The relationship between the two countries was continuously upgraded from being a "reliable, stable and long-term partnership" (2002) to moving "[t]owards a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity in Asia" (2006), fostering a "[s]trategic partnership for peace and prosperity in Asia" (2009), and elevating ties to an "[e]xtensive strategic partnership for peace and prosperity in Asia" (2014). In addition, Vietnam and Japan have also closely and effectively cooperated at regional and international forums such as the UN, conferences of ASEAN+, APEC, ASEM, and so on, make greater contributions to peace, stability, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region, in line with Vietnam's foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, diversification, and multilateralization. In particular, the two countries actively cooperated for the success of the 25th APEC Summit in Da Nang and jointly pushed ahead negotiations to reach the signing of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). The relationship between the two countries has been expanded in all fields based on an extensive strategic partnership, especially in the fields of defense, security, culture, education-training, and infrastructure development.

In sum, since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1973, the friendship and cooperation between Vietnam and Japan have been continuously nurtured by generations of leaders and people, becoming a common treasure of both countries.⁸ The potential for cooperation between the two countries is still great, thanks to mutual trust and strengths that can supplement mutual development. Given their shared common interests and the solid foundation of high political trust, and the deep empathy among the two peoples that they have cultivated, it can be said that now is the best time in the history of bilateral relations between Vietnam and Japan without major obstacles to further promoting the relationship at the bilateral level.⁹

Vietnam and Japan's needs in improving the quality of human resources through education cooperation

According to U.S. News, in 2019, Japan was one of the ten best countries for education worldwide. Meanwhile, Vietnam's education was ranked 65th out of the 80 best countries. Generally, Vietnam's quality of education and training is still low with many weaknesses and limitations, has not met the country's needs of innovation and international economic integration, for example, outdated teaching methods, students' lack of creativity and initiative in learning, as well as the lack of simple and easy to use instruments for the assessment of creativity, especially, the negative situation in exams and "academic achievement disease." To improve Vietnam's education, it is necessary to strengthen

⁷ Tam-Sang Huynh (2021), "Vietnam-Japan relations: Growing importance in each other's eyes", ISEAS, <<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2020-31-vietnam-japan-relations-growing-importance-in-each-others-eyes-by-huynh-tam-sang/>>.

⁸ Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Japan, <<https://vnembassy-jp.org/en/strengthening-vietnam-japan-extensive-strategic-partnership>>.

⁹ Thuy-Thi Do, "Locating Vietnam-Japan's strategic partnership in the changing East Asian political landscape", <https://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/fellow_report/140711_Vietnam-Japan_Strategic_Partnership-Final_paper_Thuy_Thi_Do.pdf>, p. 37.

education reform and cooperate with prestigious educated countries in the world. This helps Vietnam achieve fundamental changes in the quality of education to approach the advanced and civilized level from the great powers for education, in line with Vietnam's circumstances and contributing to the country's development. Moreover, education is always considered a top priority in Vietnam's domestic and foreign policy. The Ninth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) affirmed that "bringing Vietnam out of underdevelopment and improving the people's material and spiritual life, and laying a foundation for the country to become a modernity-oriented industrial country by 2020 and to become a modern industrial country with a socialist orientation by the mid-21st century."¹⁰ To achieve this goal, education plays an crucial role in determining the success of the industrialization and modernization process of the country.

In the context of globalization and competition amplified by science and technology, international cooperation promotes the strength of Vietnamese education to keep up with the advanced countries' development level and gradually integrate with global trends. Moreover, in the context of industrialization and modernization, Vietnam needs to reform education and improve the quality of human resources. Although Vietnam has been recognized as a country with abundant workforces backed by a young population, the shortage of a skilled workforce is one of the biggest disadvantages of Vietnam's human resources market. Meanwhile, Japan has demonstrated the excellence of its education system by regularly being among the top-performing countries. Still, today's rapidly shrinking and aging population situation is posing new challenges to Japan in supplementing a high-skilled workforce. Moreover, Vietnamese culture also has many interesting features that serve as the cultural intersection of Chinese culture, Western culture, and Southeast Asian culture. Vietnam also needs to promote education cooperation to enhance its position and influence globally. Currently, Vietnam has also made progress in exporting education to the world in general and Japan in particular. For example, since 2016, the Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS) has started organizing the annual contest of eloquence in Vietnamese, and the Vietnamese language proficiency tests have been officially held in Japan since 2017. These events show the potential of "internationalizing" Vietnamese education in Japan and other countries around the world if Vietnam knows how to promote their national culture.¹¹

THE SITUATION OF HIGHER-EDUCATION COOPERATION BETWEEN VIETNAM AND JAPAN

Vietnam's higher-education cooperation policies

The policy framework for Vietnam's higher-education cooperation is based on Education Development Strategy and Higher Education Reform Agenda. The current overall strategy of Vietnam's higher education is the "Education development strategy for 2001–2010 and 2011–2020. Specifically, in 2001, the Ninth National Congress of the CPV set up the Socio-Economic Strategic Development Plan 2001–2010, stating that "in order to meet the demand for human resources, a decisive factor in the country's development plan in the period of industrialization and modernization, it is necessary to create radical changes overall in education and training."¹² According to the Strategy for Education Development 2001–2010, the goals defined for higher education are to expand

¹⁰ Vietnamese Government, "Political Report of the Eighth Party Central Committee at the Ninth National Congress of the Party",

<<http://chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/NuocCHXHCNVietNam/ThongTinTongHop/noidungvankiendaihoiendan?categoryId=10000714&articleId=10038377>>, accessed on October 15, 2021.

¹¹ Vien-Anh T. Le, "Vietnam-Japan education cooperation between 2002 and 2018", Master thesis, USSH, 2019, pp. 33-34.

¹²Thuy-Anh Nguyen (2009), "The Internationalization of Higher Education in Vietnam: National Policies and Institutional Implementation at Vietnam National University, Hanoi", p. 5, <<http://www.waseda-giari.jp/sysimg/imgs/wp2008-E-21.pdf>>.

cooperation in training and researching with prestigious and high-quality universities and institutions around the world to exchange experiences and increase resources for educational development, in which, it is necessary for mobilizing resources from international cooperation, building infrastructure for higher education, and increasing the number of aid and loan projects as well as cooperating to build high-tech centers in universities and institutions. In addition, higher-education cooperation also involves importing advanced experimental equipment to improve the efficiency of training and scientific research and developing research projects, information exchange, and international conferences. This shows that higher-education cooperation is one of the important measures to meet the requirements of high-quality human resources in the country's industrialization and modernization.

To implement the contents mentioned above, in the first decade of the 21st century, top Vietnamese leaders made many official visits to Japan and signed agreements on cultural and education cooperation. Examples include, the general secretary of the CPV who had two visits to Japan in October 2002 and April 2009; President Nguyen Minh Triet visited Japan in November 2007; Prime Minister (PM) Phan Van Khai paid three visits to Japan in April 2003, December 2003 and June 2004. In these visits, the two countries signed a lot of important agreements to promote Vietnam–Japan education cooperation, such as the Joint Statement on Vietnam–Japan Information Technology Cooperation (6/2004). Accordingly, the two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in the scientific and technical fields; Joint statement on “Towards a Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity in Asia” (2007), in which, Vietnam and Japan achieved a series of important agreements in many fields, especially, expanding education and training cooperation between the two countries. A remarkable step forward, in the visit of Vietnam's Minister of Education and Training Nguyen Thien Nhan to Japan in 2008, is the Japanese government's pledge to help train 1,000 Vietnamese doctoral students in a 13-year-long project worth JPY 20 billion, funded through ODA starting from the fiscal year 2008.¹³

Following the Strategy for Education Development 2001–2010, the Strategy for Education Development 2011–2020 has had necessary adjustments. It is based on a system of philosophy that creatively applies the Party and State's guiding viewpoints in line with the new period. As such, improving the effectiveness of higher education management and cooperation was considered a breakthrough element to enhance higher education quality. In the past few years, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has encouraged and assisted Vietnamese higher education institutions to build and expand relationships with Japanese Institutions. By cooperating, Vietnamese institutions can take advantage of and utilize financial, technical, and equipment support to improve educational and training quality at home.¹⁴ So far, there have been approximately 100 projects of different sizes carried out at both undergraduate and graduate levels.¹⁵ These projects have improved the quality of higher education in Vietnam and helped strengthen the relationships between Vietnam and Japan's educational institutions.

Japan's higher-education cooperation policies

Japan has implemented the strategy of socialization of education since 2000. Accordingly, an important element in Japan's educational goals is the human, but due to Japan's aging population and labor shortage in many important segments, human resource cooperation has become an urgent issue of the country. To accelerate education cooperation with Vietnam, Japan established Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Vietnam Office in Hanoi in 1995 and in Ho Chi Minh City

¹³ Thuy-Thi Do, “Locating Vietnam–Japan's strategic partnership in the changing East Asian political landscape”, <https://www2.jiia.or.jp/pdf/fellow_report/140711_Vietnam-Japan_Strategic_Partnership-Final_paper_Thuy_Thi_Do.pdf>, p. 17.

¹⁴ Thuy-Anh Nguyen (2009), “The Internationalization of Higher Education in Vietnam: National Policies and Institutional Implementation at Vietnam National University, Hanoi”, p. 19, <<http://www.waseda-giari.jp/sysimg/imgs/wp2008-E-21.pdf>>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

(HCMC) in 2002. Only six years from 2000 to 2006, JICA dispatched 1,594 experts to Vietnam.¹⁶ As of 2011, there were a total of 320 Japanese volunteers came to work in Vietnam. In addition, since 2001, JICA has started to send senior volunteers to Vietnam to support training for small-medium enterprises and supporting industries.¹⁷ Japan has also cooperated with Vietnam in training human resources through the Vietnam–Japan Human Resource Corporation Center (VJCC). In 2002, VJCC implemented three main activities, including business courses, Japanese language courses, and cultural exchanges with Japanese experts' support. In 2008, VJCC expanded activities to support international students who want to study in Japan and connect Vietnamese students with Japanese universities and businesses. In March 2008, with the approval of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam, the Japan Foundation Vietnam-Japan Cultural Exchange Center was established in Hanoi as an overseas base of the Japan Foundation. Currently, the organization has become an important cultural–educational exchange bridge between Vietnam and Japan. It is also a playground for Vietnamese and Japanese students meet and exchange to improve their understanding of the culture and history of the two countries.

In particular, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has also accelerated cooperation and support for other countries in education through Japan Students Services Organization (JASSO). This is the leading organization in providing information and advice to people interested in studying in Japan, as well as its assistance and subsidies for schooling expenses for studying in Japan and support for international student accommodations. JASSO currently has five representative offices in Indonesia, Thailand, Korea, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Although JASSO Vietnam was officially opened in Hanoi on 27 March 2017 and is the fifth overseas representative office of JASSO, this organization has operated in Vietnam since 2005 through programs of exhibition and counseling study abroad. As such, it can be seen that since the early years of the 21st century, Japan has had relatively comprehensive and effective education cooperation policies with Vietnam, with the participation of many agencies and organizations by clear mechanisms which greatly support Vietnamese students while studying in Japan, as well as bringing high-quality and prestigious programs to Vietnam that contribute to implementing Japan's educational philosophy so that the country could demonstrate its international role, responsibility, and position while simultaneously promoting Vietnam-Japan relations new heights.

The achieved results of higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan

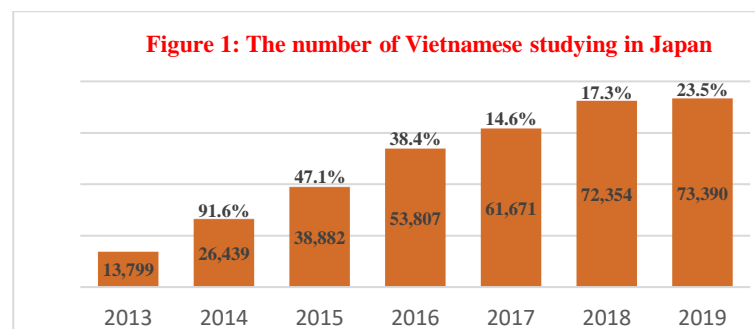
Before the 21st century, education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan covered Japanese teaching and lecturers exchange. Since the early 21st century, Japan has had some changes in education policy with an impression that the former Monbu-shō and the former Science and Technology Agency (科学技術庁 Kagaku-gijutsu-chō) merged to become the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (文部科学省 Monbu-kagaku-shō), also known as MEXT, Monka-shō. In 2002, MEXT offered a government scholarship (Monbukagakusho scholarship) for the first time, also known as MEXT scholarship or Monbu-shō scholarship for international students wishing to study in Japan. At the same time, MEXT has sent teachers and delivered curricula worldwide to serve full-time Japanese international schools. Monbukagakusho Scholarship in particular and programs implemented by MEXT, in general, have attracted a lot of international students, including Vietnamese students studying in Japan, beginning a comprehensive development of higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan. In 2002, Japan began recruiting first-year Vietnamese students in the Japanese language education and culture, doctoral students (1.5–2 years), undergraduate students (5 years), and students of professional schools (3 years). Since 2002, Japan has annually offered 100 scholarships for Vietnamese students.

¹⁶ JICA's cooperation schemes, < https://www.jica.go.jp/vietnam/office/others/pdf/pamph_e03.pdf>.

¹⁷ JICA Vietnam Office (2012), "Vietnam-Japan cooperation through JICA", p. 8, <https://www.jica.go.jp/vietnam/office/others/pdf/pamph_JICA_v02.pdf>

By accepting many international students, the Japanese government wishes to enrich the domestic skills pool, expand international relations, enhance mutual understanding and contribute to maintaining global stability and peace. In Vietnam, therefore, Japanese education has been widely advertised in the mass media., Japanese government scholarships such as Japan Human Resource Development Scholarships (JDS), JICA, MEXT, and so on are very attractive to Vietnamese students. Learning the Japanese language and going to Japan for studying and employment has become a fashionable trend in Vietnam. The main cooperation mechanism between Vietnam and Japan in this period includes the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship by Japanese Grant Aid (JDS) started in Vietnam since 2000. So far, there have been 691 fellows have been sent to Japan.¹⁸ Moreover, Japan committed to training 1,000 Vietnamese lecturers to get a doctoral degree by 2020, along with short-term and long-term scholarships for up to 100 Vietnamese students per year. In addition, the Vietnamese government also approved Project 599, “Training Officers Abroad by State Budget in the Period 2013–2020,” to grant scholarships to competent candidates to pursue either undergraduate or graduate programs. The project targets to offer 1,650 scholarships at the master level and 150 at the bachelor level.¹⁹ The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) is directly responsible for the goals, subjects, standards, the number of candidates who will be selected to study abroad, and assessing the quality of candidates. This project once again creates more opportunities for many students who would like to study in Japan and helps to concretize higher-education cooperation between the two countries.

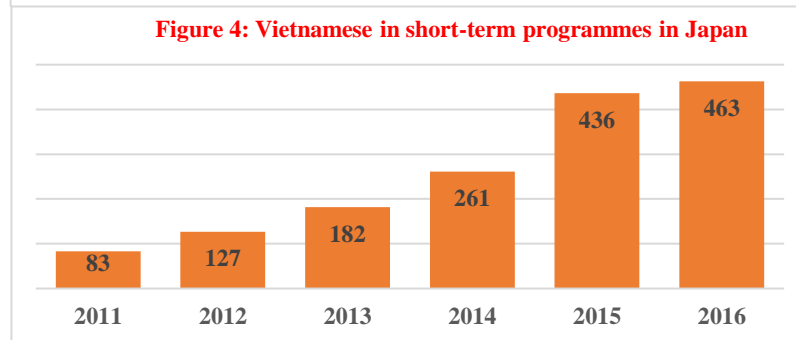
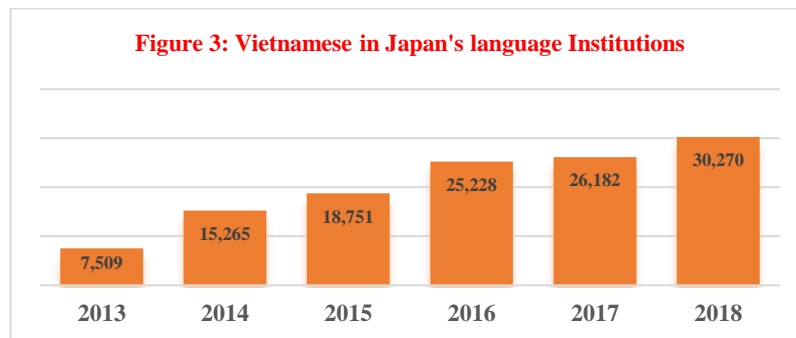
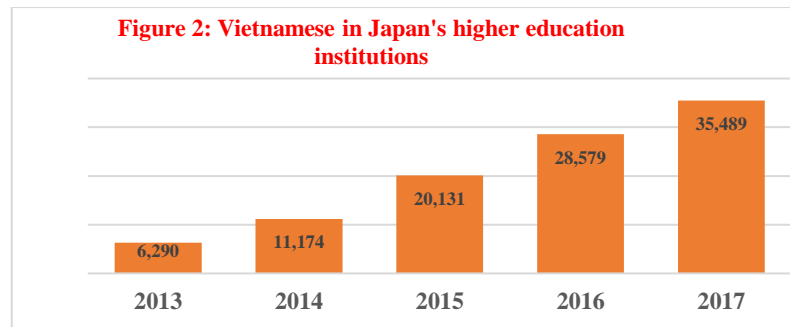
As a result, the number of Vietnamese studying in Japan grew more than 14-fold between 2010 and 2018 to around 72,354. They now accounted for nearly a quarter of international students in Japan, ranked second in the world (behind Chinese students only), and ranked first in the Southeast Asian region. Vietnamese students are also increasingly present in Japanese higher education institutions and increased nearly 6-fold between 2013 and 2017 (from 6,290 to 35,489 people). The number of Vietnamese studying in Japanese language institutions and short-term programs in Japan has also increased over the past years. “For years, Vietnam and China have been vying for the top spot as the leading sender for Japanese language studies in Japan. In 2016, Vietnam won with 2,007 more students than China. Vietnam did it again in 2018, when there were slightly more Vietnamese (30,270 which was 33.5% of the total) than Chinese (28,510 which was 31.5% of the total) studying Japanese in Japan”.²⁰ (see figure 1, 2, 3 & 4).



¹⁸ JDS, “Application for JDS 2021 is coming soon”, <<https://jds-scholarship.org/country/vietnam/index.html>>.

¹⁹ “Vietnam higher education: Policy and system update”, <<https://internationaleducation.gov.au/International-network/vietnam/publications/Documents/Vietnam%20High%20Education%20Policy%20and%20Systems%20Update.pdf>>, p. 6.

²⁰ BMI Market Report Vietnam, “Student recruitment in Vietnam, <<https://bmiglobaled.com/Market-Reports/Vietnam/student-recruitment>>.



Source: <https://bmiglobaled.com/Market-Reports/Vietnam/student-recruitment>

The number of Vietnamese students in Japan has continued to grow over the years due to several factors such as geographic proximity, cultural similarities, work abroad opportunities, and strengthening economic ties.²¹ According to the latest statistics from JASSO as of May 2020, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the number of international students in Japan dropped 10.4% year on year to 279,597, but the number of Vietnamese students enrolled in Japanese universities still ranked second in Asia with 62,233 (behind China).²²

The figures mentioned above show that Japan has become an attractive destination for Vietnamese students and interns. This number will increase more in the future, contributing to promoting and strengthening Vietnam-Japan relations in general, and education cooperation between the two countries.

Regarding connecting human resources, the two countries have closely cooperated to implement the Strategic Program on Education Cooperation 2014 effectively. Based on Japan's experience of the comprehensive human resources development for various industries and Vietnam's request in building high-quality universities in Vietnam, Japan committed its assistance to upgrade four high-quality universities and vocational training schools into internationally standardized ones, including Can Tho University, Da Nang University, Vietnam National University, and the Vietnam

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Vietnam ranks second in number of students in Japan", *Nhan Dan online*, August 12, 2021, <<https://en.nhandan.vn/society/education/item/10297702-vietnam-ranks-second-in-number-of-students-in-japan.html>>.

National University of Agriculture.²³ In particular, Japan actively helped Vietnam establish Vietnam–Japan University in July 2014. It can be said that the establishment of Vietnam–Japan University is not only the achievement of the extensive strategic partnership between the two governments but also the crystallization of ideas, ambitions, and dedication of scientists, agencies, organizations, and businesses of the two countries. The university offers undergraduate and graduate degrees, including some majors in information technology such as computer science and engineering, infrastructure engineering, environmental engineering, and nanotechnology. This is one of the basic forms of higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan and symbolizes the strategic relationship between the two countries.

Additionally, the Japanese side also supports a wide range of activities essential to the dissemination of the Japanese language and the development of Japanese-language education in Vietnam, such as Sending Experts of Japanese Language, Japanese Teaching Material Purchase Grant, Salary Assistance Grant for Japanese Language Courses, Japanese-Language Learners Event Grant, and Japanese-Language Education Project Grant.²⁴ The Japan Foundation Center for Cultural Exchange in Vietnam has overseen these activities since the earlier part of 2009. As a result, the Japanese language is increasingly attracting Vietnamese students, and they have become one of the important bridges in the relationship between Vietnam and Japan.

Challenges

In addition to the achieved results of higher-education cooperation between Vietnam and Japan as mentioned earlier, there are still some challenges that need to be addressed to not affect the relationship between the two countries in the future.

First, the “brain drain” phenomenon

Over the past decades, Vietnam had to face an extremely serious brain drain. First of all, qualified people who are well-trained through bilateral education cooperation programs between Vietnam and Japan, were attracted to work for Japanese companies in both Japan and affiliated companies in Vietnam. This is because the salaries at Vietnamese companies as well as state agencies are not commensurate with higher-educated people or their experience. Meanwhile, Japanese companies always give preferential treatment policies to attract highly-skilled foreign workers. Vietnam’s goal in higher-education cooperation with Japan is to have high-quality human resources and acquire Japanese advanced scientific and technological achievements. After graduating, however, the human resources do not return home, so this causes the most talented workforce is being wasted and even affects the country’s future. Therefore, to reduce the brain drain phenomenon, it is necessary to enhance Vietnam’s internal strength and economic potential.

Second, the problem of Vietnamese students working part-time in Japan

Japan is one of the most expensive countries in Asia to live in, but not all students studying in Japan can afford to pay all expenses, while monthly stipends from scholarships are limited, forcing Vietnamese students to look for part-time jobs. Even many students spend more time earning money than focusing on their academic performance; they cannot have a healthy balance between working and studying. Many students who had enrolled in universities were found to have remained illegally in Japan after their student visas had expired.²⁵ This has led to Japan tightening visa regulations for Vietnamese students since 2017 to manage students’ part-time jobs. This has also been directly affecting the image of Vietnam and its people. In recent years, Vietnam has always been in the top 10 sending countries of students to Japan, so it is necessary to have proper attention from authorities and

²³ Manh Hung, “Strengthening the Vietnam – Japan strategic partnership”, *Communist Party of Vietnam online*, January 16, 2013, < <https://dangcongsan.vn/chinh-tri/khong-ngung-vun-dap-quan-he-doi-tac-chien-luoc-viet-nam--nhat-ban-167150.html>>.

²⁴ About Japan Foundation Language Grant, <<https://www.jflalc.org/grants-jle>>.

²⁵ Suvendrini Kakuchi, “Government tightens rules as foreign students disappear”, *University World News*, 25 May 2019, < <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2019052116072279>>.

a thorough understanding of the whole society about students' part-time jobs, especially illegal overtime work, to avoid affecting the image of Vietnamese students and people as well as the bilateral relationship between Vietnam and Japan.

CONCLUSION

Over the past two decades, along with the development of the extensive and comprehensive strategic partnership between Vietnam and Japan, higher-education cooperation between the two countries has also been increasingly developing. This arises from the trend of international cooperation in higher education in general, and from Vietnam and Japan's needs in improving the quality of human resources as well as supplementing human resources that are lacking. In order to further stimulate higher-education cooperation between the two countries, in addition to the two governments' efforts in tightening the relationship, Vietnam and Japan's universities also need to improve the quality of training for their students and actively cooperate with Japanese businesses to strengthen the university's linkage with the businesses who will use the school's student forces. Maintaining this relationship will create an opportunity for students to be in contact with the real working environment while simultaneously providing feedback on the university's training quality. This is also an opportunity for universities and colleges to update information to meet the enterprises' recruitment needs and necessary skills, especially fastidious Japanese businesses. In particular, it is necessary to accelerate Japanese-language training programs for Vietnamese students. Additionally, universities should also organize many academic competitions, research on the Japanese language, culture, or relations between the two countries to encourage students to show their skills, as well as expand knowledge, and this program will become a bridge for Vietnam–Japan relations at present and in the future. Moreover, schools and faculties that teach Japanese or affiliate with Japan should organize field trips and exchanges with Vietnamese–Japanese enterprises, creating opportunities for students to visit and work at Japanese enterprises during studying and inviting alumni, business owners, or foreign lecturers. This will help students to have a realistic vision of their future work.

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