

# Vocational Training Policy for Ethnic Minority Labour in Transitional Countries: The Case Study in the Northwestern of Vietnam



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## 1 Introduction

Located in the western mountainous region of Northern Vietnam, the Northwestern region consists of 6 provinces, including Lao Cai, Dien Bien, Lai Chau, Son La, Yen Bai and Hoa Binh, accounting for 15.3% of the country's area, and shares borders with Laos and China. The terrain is high and deeply divided, but it is a strategic location which is especially important for national defense and security with a large amount of natural resources.

In 2019, the population of the Northwestern was 4.7 million, accounting for 4.9% of the country's total population, 74.6% of which are ethnic minorities. The regional ethnic diversity is great with 50 different groups, of Vietnam's 53 total groups being represented. The majority of the regional population live in rural areas (82.8%) and the population density is sparse (9319 people/km<sup>2</sup>). Thai, Muong and H'mong are the 3 largest groups in the region, making up over 2.6 million people, 43% of which are of Thai ethnicity. As many as 32 groups have a population of under 5000, with only a handful of people from certain groups living in the region. Therefore, the Northwestern region is usually known as the cultural space of the Thai people, famous for «xoe hoa» dance, or the precious cultural dance done with fans.

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With regards to the population structure of ethnic minorities in the Northwestern area, the labour force (aged 15 and over) accounts for a high proportion (69.2%). More specifically, the 15–44 age group accounts for 49% of the working age population. This is an essential resource for regional socio-economic development. However, the proportion of those who are formally employed here is very low. Therefore, the Northwestern region has the highest rate of poor ethnic minority households nationwide. As many as 22 out of 85 the poorest districts in Vietnam which receive assistance attentively from the State are located in the region (The Prime Minister 2018).

In recent years, the State of Vietnam has issued many policies towards vocational training and employment issues to support ethnic minority workers and particularly those in the Northwestern mountainous areas so that they can actively participate in the labour market, and gradually and sustainably overcome poverty. The implemented policies have helped many ethnic minority households settle down, discard their nomadic cultivation and gradually improve their material and spiritual life. However, the employment quality and labour productivity of ethnic minority workers remain low, even though the demand for vocational training is still very high while the resources for policy implementation are limited. Many vocational training policies have not achieved the desired results, or have not taken into account local characteristics and regional differences.

By synthesizing findings of research and policies with the published statistics of the General Statistics Office (GSO) and the Directorate of Vocational Education and Training (DVET), this study provides an overall picture of central and local vocational training policies enforced in the Northwestern region. Simultaneously, the impacts of the policies on vocational training institutions and ethnic minorities in the Northwestern region are also analyzed and evaluated, which shall prompt appropriate policy solutions. The findings of the study are not only of academic value but also lay a foundation for central and local governments to direct vocational training in the context of the sector's economic structure being altered to achieve sustainable poverty reduction and to boost the socio-economic development of the Northwestern region.

## 2 Literature Review

Williams (1963) argues that while university education is associated with theoretical or academic issues, vocational education is practical. Vocational education prepares individuals “for an immediate entry into the labour market” (Beilmann and Espenberg 2016). Vocational education comprises home economics, general work, and life skills industrial arts (Cantor 1989). Vocational or technical education is designed to educate participants with the practical skills and the know-how to implement them in a particular situation (UNESCO 2003). Vocational training as “provides people with the skills and learning required by enterprises and industries” (Moodie 2002).

Instead of providing a broad field of knowledge comparable to social sciences, physical sciences, and the humanities, vocational education aims to transmit exploitable knowledge to manpower participating in the labour market (Feinberg 1983).

Technical education training, therefore, provides not only technical skills for the professional (Sabates et al. 2012) but also general and useful skills for daily activities (Speake 2007). Vocational education training enhances skills and confidence of learners in workplaces and the self-esteem of learners as well (Tennant and Yates 2005). Vocational education training is also linked to the development of personal confidence as well as the desire for further education (Gendron 2005). It is said that, being well prepared for their profession provides the chance for individuals to control their work and affords them opportunities to move to another industry (Field and Malcolm 2010). In the context of expansive urbanization, vocational education training creates not only opportunities for individuals, but also the local areas because it is expected to meet the demands of manpower and the local authorities. Vocational education training provides chances for educated labour to move into both industrial and service sectors but also enhances “rural farmers’ capacity to use science and technology as well as marketing knowledge to work effectively on the farm” to produce agricultural products for commercialization (Shan et al. 2015).

Vocational schools can be managed by the local educational authorities, private organizations or the Ministry of Labour. Training courses are provided by one of three kinds of institutions, state-owned, collectively-owned, or privately-owned institutions (Elson-Rogers and Westphalen 2000). Models of vocational training comprise school-based vocational training, apprenticeship training, and in-service training (Lauglo 1993). Different nations have different systems of vocational education employing various sorts of teaching methods. Vocational education and training regulations are influenced by state control, corporatism, and free-market models. The state plays a crucial role in concern with social partners and other labour market actors (Souto-Otero and Ure 2012). The scope and objectives of vocational education and training are differentiated from each other (Ulimwengu and Badiane 2010). Many countries, outside of the Anglosaxon system, “have extensive vocational programs at upper secondary level,” while Anglosaxon countries tend to arrange such programs for post-secondary level (OECD 2010). The corporatist model of Germany is considered to be the most effective as “individual company identities are embedded in, rather than hostile to, the corporatism of German business life” (Crouch 1992). The financial support mechanisms for participation in vocational education and training courses differ from each other. The vocational courses could be funded differently, from state-led funding, social partner funding, demand-led funding: (i) state-led funding offers subsidies for enterprises and/or employees to encourage participation in training according to the policy priorities of the time; (ii) social partner schemes focus on specific objectives such as training lower-skilled workers, even unemployed people; (iii) demand-led funding “may be targeted or universal” as they “may be funded by the government (central/local/regional), by social partners (including individual enterprises) or mixed funding” (Elson-Rogers and Westphalen 2000). Individual funding could also be included (Westphalen 1999).

Cooke (2005) indicates several problems related to vocational training providers, including administrative issues, student recruitment problems, training resource and provision problems and employment problems for graduates. Beilmann and Espenberg (2016) indicate that some individuals prefer to take part in a practical career with their hands rather than sitting in class. Many participants drop out because of their increasing dissatisfaction, as they had a clear idea of what they wanted to learn, but they were not allowed to do so. They realized that the chosen specialty was not adequate. Also, in the labour market, there are several jobs that can be obtained without any qualification requirements, and going to school, and acquiring proper education was a waste of time. Also, the connection between training and work would never be neglected (Lauglo 1993).

A minority is defined as “a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination” (Wirth 1945). Brubaker (1996) defines the three main characteristics of national minorities: (1) the demands of ethnic minority groups to an ethnocultural nation differs from others of their own country; (2) the ethnocultural nationality of ethnic minority groups need to be recognized separately by the state; (3) the demands of these people on certain cultural and political common rights depend on their ethnocultural nationality. The existence of a minority in a society implies that their social status and privileges are lower than that of dominant groups in the society. Minority groups hardly participate in all activities of the society (Veres 2015). Many people from ethnic minorities, all over the world, experience similar hurdles such as poverty and lower schooling, accommodation, unsecured employment originating from their ethnocultural nationalities, irrespective of a number of supportive policies enacted by their governments (Phillion et al. 2012).

Ethnic minority groups normally have disadvantageous geographical and economic conditions, and hence, the labour force in these groups tends to face more difficulties in the labour market. Specifically, ethnic minorities have an inferior academic background; thus, they mainly find employment in simple, low-skilled jobs that are not only underpaid but also unstable and unsustainable. In the context of automation and technology changes in the world economy, it is said that educational and technological skills must be advanced to succeed, which creates even more challenges to ethnic minority groups (Do et al. 2020). Globalization has resulted in numerous diversification strategies related to the livelihoods of minorities (Caouette et al. 2009). Livelihood diversification of minorities results in direct or indirect changes through the adjustment to on-farm or off-farm activities (Niehof 2004). Changes in on-farm activities, under globalization and multi-national agricultural industries, link to improvements in labour-skills concerning agrarian intensification and diversification. In contrast, variation in off-farm activities leads to an increase in labours associated with non-farm activities, leading to “rural-urban migration and de-agrarianization” (Trinzi et al. 2014).

Training in general and vocational training, in particular, plays an important part in improving job opportunities and wages for workers in ethnic minority groups. This would require a suitable public policy on vocational training for the ethnic minorities.

Public policy is defined as a course of action that the government chooses to do or not to do (Anderson 2014). Policies on vocational education training address the search for productivity of participants, satisfy the hunt for skilled manpower from employers and enhance the connection between training and work. This means that policies on vocational education have to deal with difficulties in recruiting and maintaining “teachers with relevant industrial experience” and keeping the curriculum updated with “changing labour market conditions and work requirements” (Lauglo 1993). A number of regulations have been issued by the state to assist and guide the operation of vocational training institutions (Cooke 2005). Furthermore, vocational education training policies aim to (i) inform the youth about their capabilities before entering the labour market; (ii) offer the youth some practical skills in particular situations; (iii) inform the youth about the mechanism of the labour market and how work is organized; (iv) provide counseling and personal assistance; (v) assist the youth in understanding the relationship between school, work, and society before making decisions (Zarifis 2000). Policy-makers should not only pay attention to participants and provider institutions, but also enterprises, as “giving adequate scope to individual companies would need, not a quick fix of direct government intervention, but a patient encouragement” (Crouch 1992).

In light of mentioned works, in this paper, policies on vocational training for minorities, therefore, are the choice for governments in dealing with vocational and technical education for minorities, related to problems of policies on vocational training providers, participants (minorities), and enterprises as well.

### **3 Overview of Vocational Training Policies for Ethnic Minority Labour in the Northwestern of Vietnam**

In the national education and training system, vocational education in general and vocational training, in particular, play a critical part in delivering Vietnam’s socio-economic development strategy. Thanks to the orientation and policies of the Communist Party and Government of Vietnam, especially ethnic policies, vocational training for ethnic minority groups has had a significant impact, contributing to the ethnic regions and the country’s socio-economic development. Accordingly, the Government has emphasized job creation for ethnic minority groups through various policies, including the system of policies on vocational education for ethnic minorities. This system consists of central and local policies, which are promulgated in laws by the National Assembly, decisions of ministers, heads of ministerial-level agencies, and decisions by People’s Committees and Resolutions by People’s Councils in provinces. Vocational training policies include general policies applicable to all subjects, policies for rural workers (including ethnic minorities) and dedicated policies for ethnic minorities.

Up until now, vocational training policies for ethnic minorities have been expressed in various forms, such as programs, policies, or projects through various

textual formats such as resolutions, decrees, and decisions. However, these vocational training policies are mainly integrated into general policies of the central government, such as Program 135, Program 30a, the National Target Program on sustainable poverty reduction in the period of 2016–2020, or education policies for ethnic minority regions and ethnic minority people.

The statistics reveal that central policies on vocational training for ethnic minorities are expressed in 15 basic policies, including 13 general policies and 2 dedicated policies for ethnic minority labour, and are classified into 3 groups: (1) policies to support trainees, (2) policies to support vocational teachers and (3) policies to support vocational training institutions. Most of the central policies on vocational training for ethnic minority labourers are presided over by the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs; others are chaired by the Ministry of Education and Training, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the Central Vietnam Women's Union and some dedicated policies are led by the Ministry of Planning and Investment. Almost all of the vocational training policies for ethnic minorities in the Northwestern region (Tay Bac) are issued by the People's Councils and People's Committees of provinces based on central policies. Policies of each province in the Northwestern region are mainly issued based on natural conditions; scale and quality of rural labour force; teachers, managers, and facilities in vocational training; rational of local economic development in each region (See Table 1).

*Trainee supporting policies:* most of the trainee supporting policies focus on providing financial support for ethnic minorities to participate in vocational training. Specifically, Decision 1956/QD-TTg dated 27 November 2009 of the Prime Minister on “Vocational Training for Rural Labourers by 2020” stipulates that ethnic minority people (together with people with disabilities and people whose land has been acquired) receive funding for short-term vocational training (elementary level, less than 3 months) with a maximum of 03 million VND/person/course (the amount may vary according to trained occupations and actual course duration); food stipend at 15,000 VND/day of training/person; travel expenses at the price of public transport ticket which is no more than 200,000 VND/person/course for trainees who live more than 15 km from their home. The National Fund for Employment under the National Target Programme also provides loans for labourers in ethnic minority areas to access the labour market after finishing vocational training. In addition, Decision 81/2005/QD-TTg on policies supporting short-term vocational training for the rural population also identifies funding policies for the working age rural population who have no formal training, or are in need for vocational training, or are eligible for short-term vocational training courses, and that those under preferential groups and of ethnic minority background are prioritised. The maximum support level is 300,000 VND/person/month and no more than 1,500,000 VND/person/vocational course. However, specific funding for each course is determined by people's committees of cities and/or provinces according to the local budget and conditions. Money is allocated and distributed to the local vocational facilities rather than directly given to trainees. As for trainees of ethnic minority background studying at boarding schools, the Prime Minister's Decision 267/2005/QD-TTg on vocational training policies for

**Table 1** Number of policies documents on vocational training for ethnic minority labour issued by the central and local government valid in 2020

No.	Organization in charge of policy implementation	Number of policy documents	<i>In which</i>				Impact fields		
			Policies for Ethnic Minorities	General policies	Supporting vocational trainees	Supporting vocational teachers	Supporting vocational training institutions		
<i>Central level</i>									
1	Ministry of Education and Training	1		1			X		
2	Ministry of Planning and Investment	2	1	1		X	X		X
3	Ministry of Labour—Invalids and Social Affairs	5	1	4		X	X		X
4	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	1		1		X			X
5	Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs	1		1		X			
6	Ministry of Finance	1		1		X			
7	Vietnam Women's Union	1		1		X			
8	Co-leading units	3		3		X	X		X

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

No.	Organization in charge of policy implementation	Number of policy documents	<i>In which</i>			Impact fields		
			Policies for Ethnic Minorities	General policies		Supporting vocational trainees	Supporting vocational teachers	Supporting vocational training institutions
	Lao Cai province	5	1	4		X		
	Dien Bien province	3	2	1		X	X	X
	Lai Chau province	1	1			X		
	Son La province	1	1			X	X	X
	Yen Bai province	1	1			X	X	X
	Hoa Binh province	3		3		X		
Total		29	8	21				

Source Synthesized by the Research Group



boarding ethnic minority students stipulates that graduate students of boarding ethnic minority secondary schools and high schools are able to receive boarding vocational training at a public vocational training institution that is eligible for boarding vocational training for occupations with a training period of 3 months or more. These students are entitled to scholarships, social allowances, and other policies as boarding high school students of ethnic minorities. Therefore, after graduating from boarding ethnic minority secondary schools and high schools, they are given priority and support to continue their vocational training to ensure that after graduation, when returning to their localities, they will be qualified and skilled enough to participate in the labour market.

*Vocational teacher supporting policies:* Decision 1956/QD-TTg dated 27/11/2009 of the Prime Minister on approving the “Vocational Training for Rural Labourers by 2020” project stipulates that vocational training teachers and managers who need to go to villages and hamlets in areas with exceptionally difficult socio-economic conditions to provide vocational training in 15 days or more within a month are entitled to travel allowance equal to 0.2 times of the minimum salary for teachers who need to visit villages and hamlets for illiteracy eradication and education universalisation. Teachers of public vocational training facilities in the mountainous, remote, border and island areas and areas inhabited by ethnic minorities shall be provided with public accommodation as teachers from pre-school education to general education levels. Some other policies also include the accommodation provision for vocational teachers.

*Vocational training institutions supporting policies:* Vocational training institutions for the ethnic minority population located in either mountainous areas or elsewhere receive funding from the State for trainees have difficulties in paying and covering training fee. Specifically, vocational training centers in 61 poor districts, according to Resolution 30a/2008/NQ-CP dated 27/12/2008 of the Government on the rapid and sustainable poverty reduction programme for 61 poor districts, receive investment in vocational training facilities. Decision 1956/QD-TTg dated 27/11/2009 of the Prime Minister on approving “Vocational Training for Rural Labourers by 2020” introduces policies supporting vocational training establishments for rural population. Specifically, vocational training centers for labourers in mountainous areas and/or of ethnic minority background receive investment in classrooms for theories, workshops, dormitories, accommodation for teachers, canteens, mini-vans, or motor-boats for transportation (equipment and/or teachers). Poor, mountainous, border, and island districts and districts inhabited by ethnic minorities with vocational training centers established since 2009 shall receive training equipment assistance for 4 popular occupations and 3–5 typically local occupations. The investment ranges from VND 9 billion to a maximum of VND 12.5 billion/center. Funding for procurement of vocational training equipment for 100 continuing education centers in districts without vocational training centers to participate in vocational training for rural workers, including those in mountainous ethnic minority areas is VND 1 billion/center.

Especially, given the existing network of vocational centers and institutions, and a number of other policies such as Decision 1379/QD-TTg, Decision 1600/QD-TTg,

Decision 889/QĐ-TTg, the Prime Minister requested the ministries, industries and provincial people's committees to review and supplement the masterplan on developing the vocational training network with the focus on vocational training institutions for rural labour according to occupations and training levels to complete the establishment of new vocational training center in districts having none. In addition, the Prime Minister has also encouraged the mobilizing of resources from society for vocational training by encouraging organizations and individuals to invest in setting up vocational training facilities for rural labour; attracting private vocational training institutions, educational institutions (i.e., universities, colleges, technical secondary schools, continuing education centers, vocational general technical centers), enterprises and institutions, manufacturers, businesses and service providers to participate in vocational training activities for the rural population.

During the period 2010–2020, policies on vocational training for ethnic minority labour enabled vocational training, stable employment, income increases and living and working condition improvements for the labourers themselves and their families. This has actively helped alleviating poverty in the related areas. The State has increased investment in vocational training institutions, constructed boarding schools for ethnic minority students, provided preferential treatment for teachers and trainees to engage people of an ethnic minority background and teachers in vocational education in mountainous and disadvantaged areas. Each province has vocational colleges and schools to generate its local workforce. However, the policies on vocational education for the ethnic minority population remain incoherent; many programmes and projects have not got the same voice, and thus become overlapping and inefficient. Inappropriate viewpoints on vocational training, considering this the State's mission, are still rampant. The employment rate after graduation is pretty high but mainly in the agriculture-forestry sector and in the form of self-employment and productivity improvement. Some participate in vocational education just for the sake of formality, which leads to gaps between training and real needs of ethnic minority workers. Besides general policies for teachers in mountainous, remote and particularly disadvantaged areas, there have not been any specific policies for vocational teachers at institutions and centers for ethnic minority people and teachers who are of ethnic minority backgrounds. The implementation of many policies, programmes, and projects has remarkably improved the life of ethnic minority people. Additionally, there have not been any specific policies to suit the local economic situation as well as customs and practices of each region.

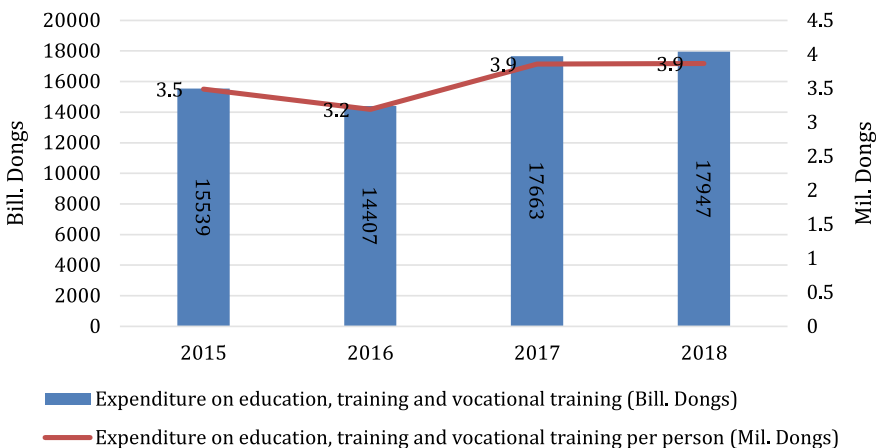
#### **4 Results of Vocational Training Policies for Ethnic Minority Labour in the Northwestern Region of Vietnam**

In order to ensure the effective implementation of vocational education, the state needs to focus necessary resources on labour, vocational training institutions and employers. In particular, finance is an important resource determining the quality of

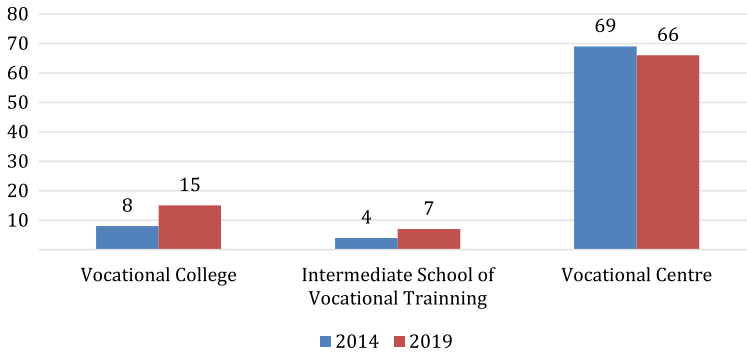
vocational education. The Northwestern provinces have spent a significant part of the state budget on education, training, and vocational training. These expenditures are the main source of funding for the implementation of vocational training targets, associated with the performance of regular tasks of vocational training institutions within the state budget’s capital allocation.

Figure 1 shows that, in absolute terms, the state budget for the Northwestern area for education and vocational training tended to increase in the period from 2015 to 2018. In 2018, the expenditure increased by more than VND 2400 billion compared to 2015. Especially, the expenditure of 2017 was VND 3255.8 billion higher than the expenditure of 2016. However, in 2016, the state budget expenditure on education and vocational training decreased by VND 1131.7 billion compared to the budget of 2015. It was because 2015 was the end year of the target program period 2011–2015, and the Government was in the process of approving the target program for the period 2016–2020, so in the Northwestern vocational training institutions had not implemented many training activities supported by the budget.

In accordance with the Law on Vocational Education, vocational training institutions include colleges, intermediate schools, and vocational education centers. Colleges include colleges and vocational colleges; intermediate schools include professional secondary schools and vocational secondary schools; vocational education centers include vocational training centers, vocational education centers, and vocational education—continuing education centers. By 2019, the Northwestern region has a total of 88 vocational training institutions (colleges account for 17%, secondary schools for 8%, and vocational training centers account for 75%). The number of vocational training centers (primary-level training) in the region is more than 3 times higher than the number of colleges (college-level training) and secondary schools; this is also the general situation in both regions and all the Country.



**Fig. 1** Expenditure on Education, Training and Vocational Training in the Northwestern, 2015–2018. *Source* General Statistics Office (2020)



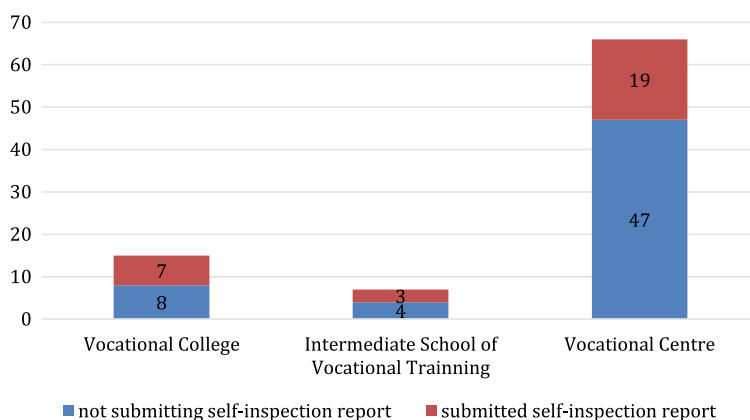
**Fig. 2** Numbers of Vocational Institution in the Northwestern of Vietnam by Type, 2014–2019. *Source* Directorate of Vocational Education and Training

In addition to financial investment for vocational training, in the period 2014–2019, the State policy for vocational training institutions was also adjusted. Consequently, the number of vocational training institutions in the Northwestern region has seen many changes, especially after the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs received the colleges from the Ministry of Education and Training. The number of colleges and secondary schools increased compared to 2014, while the number of vocational training centers decreased due to merger and dissolution (see Fig. 2).

Along with the projects on merger and dissolution of inefficient vocational training institutions, the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs also stipulates the criteria and standard for vocational education quality accreditation (Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs 2017). This is an important activity aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of management and administration, contributing to improving the quality of training in vocational training institutions in general and the Northwestern region in particular. According to a report by the General Department of Vocational Education, in 2017, 29 out of 88 vocational training institutions in the Northwestern conducted self-tests and submitted reports, higher than the national rate of 20.9% (see Fig. 3).

The improved vocational training quality is the premise for vocational training institutions in the region to increase the scale of training. In 2019, the number of ethnic minority people attending vocational training at vocational training institutions increased to 10,679 people compared to 6467 people in 2015. However, the increase is not equal at the levels of training, primary education level of education increased by 4.3 times, intermediate level by 2.1 times, while college level decreased sharply from 2358 learners in 2015 to 163 students in 2019 (See Table 2). The cause may stem from the employment characteristics of ethnic minorities in the Northwestern regions that are mostly self-employed and do not require a high level of occupational skills.

Table 2 shows that the main age group participating in apprenticeship is from 15–24, this is the ethnic minority group that will become the main labour force of



**Fig. 3** Number of Vocational Institutions in the Northwestern of Vietnam Submitted Self-inspection Report, 2017. *Source* Directorate of Vocational Education and Training

**Table 2** Ethnic minority people at 15 years of age and above in the of Vietnam taking vocational training, 2015–2019, person

Age group	2015			2019		
	Degree of vocational certificates	Degree of intermediate vocational certificates	Degree of vocational college	Degree of vocational certificates	Degree of intermediate vocational certificates	Degree of vocational college
15–24	626	2053	1911	3198	4184	7
25–34	66	788	350	180	1823	70
35–44	99	273	72	94	871	68
45–59	8	196	25	17	148	19
Over 60	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	799	3310	2358	3490	7026	163

*Source* Survey on the Socio-Economic Situation of 53 Ethnic Minority Group in Vietnam, 2015, 2019

the region, so it is necessary to orient the vocational training in accordance with the village's needs and socio-economic development orientations of localities.

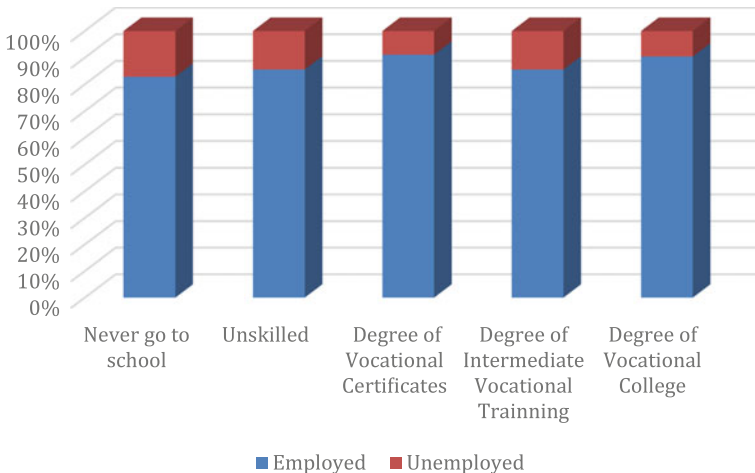
In the period 2015–2019, the vocational training policy implemented in the Northwestern region resulted in 51,141 ethnic minority people being trained at all levels. The result of the policy has significantly improved the professional level of labour in the region. The proportion of the labour force aged 15 and over who has undergone a significant increase has increased from 5.7% in 2015 to 8.8% in 2019 (see Fig. 4). However, the Northwestern area is still the region with the lowest proportion of ethnic minorities aged 15 and older who have received vocational training



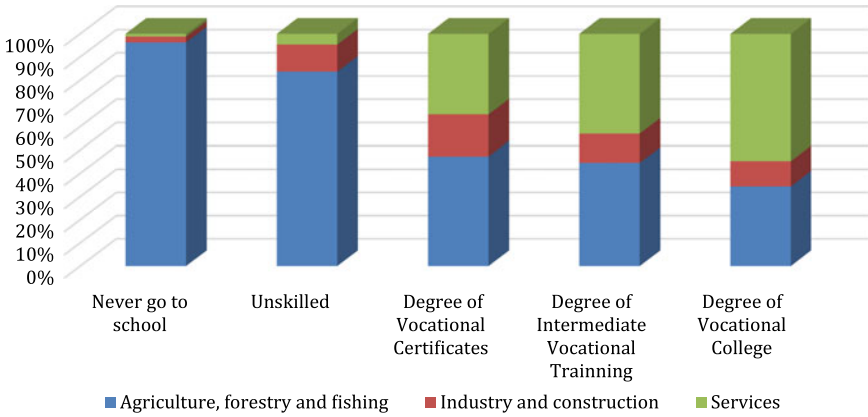
**Fig. 4** Ethnic minority people at 15 years and above in the Northwestern of Vietnam with vocational training, 2015–2019. *Source* Survey on the socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minority group in Vietnam, 2015, 2019

in the whole country (23.1% for the whole country in 2019 (Central Population and Housing Census Steering Committee 2019)).

Vocational training increases employment opportunities and enhances the gathering of ethnic minorities (Do et al. 2020). The reality in the Northwest also follows the same rule, but the rate of employed people in vocational training is the highest (see Fig. 5). Therefore, the Government’s policy of supporting vocational training for ethnic minorities in the Northwestern region should focus on simple vocational



**Fig. 5** Percentage of ethnic minority people at 15 years and above in the Northwestern of Vietnam by employment status and by qualification, 2019. *Source* Survey on the socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minority group in Vietnam, 2019



**Fig. 6** Ethnic minority labours in the Northwestern by economic sectors and qualification, 2019. *Source* Survey on the socio-economic situation of 53 ethnic minority group in Vietnam, 2019

training, creating opportunities for them to increase productivity in self-employment and family labour. This is also the employment position that the majority of the Northwestern ethnic minority labours are engaged in (accounting for 85% of the total number of employed labours in 2019).

If only ethnic minority labourers were employed in the Northwestern region in 2019, Fig. 6 shows a clear trend that the more highly educated vocational training is, the more labourers will work in the translation industry. However, most labourers do not have a professional qualification or education to work in agriculture, forestry, and fishery. Based on these practical results, the training professions of vocational training institutions at different levels in the Northwestern region should guide the needs of the labour market.

## 5 Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study provide evidence that vocational training policies for ethnic minorities have achieved certain successes:

*For ethnic minorities:*

Firstly, policies have brought positive changes, uniformity in vocational qualifications and skills for ethnic minority labour groups.

Secondly, vocational training policies, together with other social security policies, have contributed to reducing the rates of income-based poverty and multidimensional poverty of ethnic minorities in recent years.

*For ethnic minority regions:*

Firstly, vocational training policies for ethnic minorities have contributed to the restructuring of the household economy in some localities, contributed to the restructuring of the local economic sector, and diversification of household income sources, especially non-agricultural incomes.

Secondly, vocational training policies for ethnic minorities have contributed to conserving and restoring traditional local craft villages, contributed to developing traditional craft villages in the context of industrialization, modernization, and integration with the world economy.

Thirdly, vocational training policies for ethnic minorities have contributed to promoting the development of non-agricultural enterprises (mainly in the construction and processing industries), contributed to creating conditions to increase employment in non-agricultural markets in localities.

*However, there are still some inadequacies:*

Firstly, the number of ethnic minority labourers who have received vocational training is still low. Most of them have just participated in short-term vocational training. There are very few labourers with an intermediate vocational training level. Although ethnic minority labourers are supported with vocational training funding, family living expenses of these labourers need to be guaranteed while they are not working. Therefore, credit loans to cover family activities during apprenticeship have a significant influence on the decision to participate in vocational training of ethnic minority labourers. After the training, labourers can find jobs by working abroad, or open their own businesses beside agriculture. Some others may need money to buy plant and animals. However, the lending policies for production development have many conditions that are difficult for ethnic minorities to meet.

Secondly, vocational training is not effective. Many ethnic minority labourers are either not able to find jobs after training or have jobs that are not connected with their trained occupations. It is difficult for non-agricultural vocational trainees to apply their knowledge and techniques to production; the number of labourers switching from the agricultural sector to industrial or service sector after vocational training is still limited. In addition, ethnic minorities only register for vocational training in the fields of animal husbandry and cultivation, because job seeking support in the locality has not been paid much attention compared to those jobs in other fields.

Thirdly, organizing classes for ethnic minorities is difficult due to unfavorable transport conditions and unsuitable methods of organizing classrooms for production, cultural and geographical practices. Therefore, classes are not able to attract ethnic minorities. Localities with many ethnic minorities have not yet developed specific vocational training policies for the localities. The coordination among sectors and localities in implementing policies is still inconsistent and loose.

The causes of these inadequacies are:

- The qualifications of ethnic minorities are uneven, as most of them have never been trained. A segment of the ethnic minority population is relatively old, has limited education and limited ability to acquire knowledge. Therefore, they are hesitant to go to school and have not been actively seeking jobs.



- In general, people, especially ethnic minorities, consider participating in vocational training to be very time consuming. They have to quit their current jobs and lose their earned income. Especially due to community practices, being afraid of changing the living environment and the way of doing business, ethnic minorities are not properly aware of the importance of vocational training for a career.
- In many localities, propaganda, consultancy, and mobilization of ethnic minorities to participate in vocational training, job searching support, guidance on loans after training, and product sales support have not been focused. The method of organizing propaganda is not abundant and ineffective. Ethnic minorities have not seen clearly efficiency after apprenticeship, so they have not actively participated in the programs.
- Local authorities at all levels and relevant agencies have not really paid attention to vocational training for ethnic minorities. Therefore, vocational training for ethnic minorities has not been integrated with socio-economic development policies and plans.

The results of this study provide several recommendations in order to encourage participation in vocational training for the purpose of promoting the efficiency of the labour market:

*First*, to labourers: Labourers need to recognize the importance of learning and to improve themselves in order to have better job opportunities and higher income. However, the training certificate is meaningful only if it is relevant to individual's competencies and market's demands. Therefore, labourers need to choose a suitable career;

*Second*, to enterprises: Creating opportunities to improve the qualifications of labourers will contribute to higher productivity and competitiveness of enterprises. Also, the enterprises should cooperate with training institutions to develop training content and to provide vocational training and support for labourers in practical activities;

*Third*, to the government: There should be specific policies supporting vocational-training service providers to organize vocational training for ethnic minority labourers. The government also needs to develop training content that is consistent with the situation of economic development in ethnic minority regions and suitable for local demands; socialize to increase investment in vocational training for ethnic minority labourers and apply flexible vocational training models.

***The specific solutions below need to be considered and implemented:***

First, localities need to be more proactive in developing vocational training plans and allocating resources for vocational training to ensure adequate and timely support for ethnic minority labourers who want to participate in apprenticeship. Completing policies that reduce tuition completely and increase scholarships as well as accommodation and travel support for vocational ethnic minorities with difficult circumstances.

Second, strengthening the network of vocational training institutions and training occupations by region and locality; focusing on building vocational training institutions for specialized/traditional jobs for ethnic areas as well as vocational education institutions that suit the conditions and needs of socio-economic development of each region, especially in mountainous areas. Prioritizing investment in material facilities for key schools in ethnic minority regions and boarding ethnic minority vocational training schools. Prioritizing funding to support rural labour for vocational training in localities with large ethnic minority populations. Training and improving the capability of vocational teachers for ethnic minorities at vocational training institutions; developing preferential and higher remuneration policies to attract talented and competent teachers, artisans and advanced craftsmen to participate in vocational training for ethnic minorities for better training quality.

Third, based on local socio-economic development conditions; culture, customs, practices of the ethnic minorities; and qualification of local ethnic minority labourers to effectively build an appropriate vocational training model, local job identity and career orientation for ethnic minorities. Reviewing and selecting portfolio of training occupations for ethnic minorities in addition to traditional occupations that focus on the requirements of high-tech agriculture in the current period. Restructuring the agricultural sector. Non-agricultural vocational training must originate from the needs of enterprises, industrial parks, manufacturing areas, large projects and labour export. Regularly updating the list of occupations, training programs, and formulating an appropriate cost structure for certain types of job to attract people to register for vocational training and to improve production efficiency in their localities.

Fourth, reforming vocational training programs to be suitable with the current market, demand and qualifications of ethnic minority trainees. Developing programs based on skills requirements of specific jobs and designing specialized training programs in ethnic languages for some ethnic minorities in mountainous areas that suit the conditions and the circumstances of these target groups. Strengthening training skills and applying lessons into production practices so that ethnic minorities can easily understand and apply them in the production process.

Fifth, building close relationships between vocational education and the labour market in regions and localities from districts and communes upwards to ensure the operation of the vocational education system aims to meet employers' needs, thus creating jobs for ethnic minorities after apprenticeship. Implementing preferential policies for enterprises investing in mountainous areas, and in ethnic minority regions, especially preferential policies for small and medium enterprises that invest in ethnic minority regions or employ ethnic minority labourers on the spot to work in enterprises. At the same time, encouraging enterprises, economic sectors, and non-public vocational training institutions to participate in vocational training and employ ethnic minority labourers to work for enterprises.

Sixth, improving the propaganda and vocational training counseling in various forms, integrating them with community cultural activities so that ethnic minorities can easily access, gain information, knowledge, and benefits from participating in vocational training. Moreover, promoting and encouraging ethnic youths to participate in longer-term training courses that can improve their capacity and help them

to find better jobs. Enhancing knowledge and information preparation for officials at all levels, party members, and local authority officials such as village and commune heads, village elders and village heads—who have a strong influence on ethnic minority communities in each area, regarding the content and importance of the Party's guidelines and resolutions on the development of ethnic minority human resources and on the role of training, improving the quality of human resources, as well as on vocational training for ethnic minorities. Ensuring that propaganda officers are knowledgeable about policies, providing adequate and timely information for ethnic employees on vocational training and job creation policies after apprenticeship so that they can promote their abilities, skills, awareness, responsibility in learning, contributing to improving the quality of training.

Seventh, developing mechanisms to link vocational training and job creation, in turn motivating ethnic minority labourers to participate actively in vocational training through specific credit support policies for trainees so they can develop production in their training fields. Developing mechanisms to provide and share information between labour supply and demand; identifying demands on vocational skills for ethnic minorities based on specific job and training level of production and business establishments in the locality; sharing information on the ability to organize vocational training courses, training occupations and the scope of supply given by vocational education institutions.

Eighth, developing mechanisms to promote active participation of business and labourers, at the same time, it is necessary to firmly understand the labour market's needs to be trained for each profession and field based on branch and sector development plans; mobilizing the participation of enterprises and good farmers in identifying demands, organizing vocational training, organizing production and consuming commodity products. This way, vocational training would bring efficiency and effectiveness for rural workers, especially ethnic minorities in mountainous areas.

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