


Spring 5-2013

# The Value of Nongovernmental Free Vocational Training in Vietnam; The Opportunities and Barriers in Teaching Japanese Cooking Skills to Disadvantaged Vietnamese Youth

Koji Asada

*SIT Graduate Institute*, [Koji.Asada@mail.sit.edu](mailto:Koji.Asada@mail.sit.edu)

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## Recommended Citation

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**THE VALUE OF NONGOVERNMENTAL FREE VOCATIONAL  
TRAINING IN VIETNAM; THE OPPORTUNITIES AND  
BARRIERS IN TEACHING JAPANESE COOKING SKILLS TO  
DISADVANTAGED VIETNAMESE YOUTH**

Koji Asada

PIM 68

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
Master of Management at the SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

May 2013

Advisor: John Vogelsang

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## **List of Abbreviations**

JICA:	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MOLISA:	Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs
ODA:	Official Development Assistance
VDF:	Vietnam Development Forum
VET:	Vocational Education and Training
VNCI:	Vietnam Competitiveness Initiative
WTO:	World Trade Organization

## **ABSTRACT**

Nongovernmental free vocational training for disadvantaged youth has been provided by various organizations in the world and has had a positive impact on the learners. This is also true in Vietnam.

However, how is the training geared to employment opportunities, designed to overcome challenges to learning and employment, and with what potential impact on the learners and communities. These questions have not been well answered.

This study examines the value of nongovernmental free vocational training in Hanoi city, Vietnam, which is in the middle of rapid economic development. Specifically, this study researched the future prospects of skill training in Japanese cooking by assessing the opportunities and barriers in teaching Japanese cooking skills to disadvantaged youth. The need of these skills is growing rapidly as there are 120 Japanese restaurants in Hanoi alone. This study highlights the growing need for skilled Japanese cooking chefs and the enormous potential to teach the skills to disadvantaged youth.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Along with Vietnam's rapid economic growth, the Vietnamese government regards vocational and educational training for youth as an important and urgent issue for further development. For example, the national budget for education and training was VND15.6 trillion (USD742 million) in 2001 and increased to VND104.77 (USD5 billion) in 2010. Further more, as a current example, the Vietnamese government decided to spend VND26 trillion (USD1.23 billion) for a project to provide vocational training for young people in rural areas from 2010 until 2020. The aims are to generate jobs for at least 600,000 young people annually, offer job consultation for 80% of young people, and reduce the unemployment rate for young people.

The concern for economic development has contributed to the Vietnamese government's policy shifting from strengthening primary education to expanding vocational training, especially in remote areas. These national training programs are mainly targeting the fields with large populations such as agriculture and industrial techniques. Although the more economic development proceeds, it becomes more important to offer skills training in the service sector like cooking. However, the government has not focused on service sector skills because they vary widely and each of the markets is very small at the present. However, the service sector is currently the



highest growth rate industry in Vietnam and various jobs are being created. In addition, since the market has not yet reached maturity, there are many opportunities for people with solid and reliable skills.

I worked as a rural development volunteer 7 years ago. During my two-year assignment in one of the poorest rural areas in Vietnam, I encountered a lot of disadvantaged families who were not benefiting from the economic growth in the cities. Most of them are landless peasants, barely making a living working for local land owners for a minimum wage. Their children had to work as farmers because of their family's economic difficulties even though they had the ability to pursue a college education. I started a bee keeping training project cooperating with local farmers and experts for income generation for poor families and stimulation of the local economy. However, the project was discontinued after I left Vietnam without ensuring the farmers' income or improving their living standards because of my not designing a business plan for the project. This experience made me realize the limitation of my ability as a volunteer with limited time and budget and the challenges of an aid development project in a remote area. Upon reflection I realized I should have connected the project with the business sector in the cities. The Vietnamese economy is rapidly growing and it will be a middle income country soon. I believe, at this moment, it is necessary for Vietnam to

implement development projects in rural areas by taking advantage of economic growth in the cities.

Based on this perspective, vocational training in the service sector is urgently necessary and highly promising. The Japanese restaurant market is growing and needs skilled Japanese chefs. I have looked closely at this field in the three years I have been working as an expatriate at a Japanese NGO in Hanoi, Vietnam's capital city. The NGO is planning to start a free vocational training skills project for poor youth in rural areas and support them to work in the city. If young people from disadvantaged situations are well-trained in Japanese cooking skills and work as chefs in Japanese restaurants, the project would have a positive impact on their lives and offer an opportunity for them to improve their living standard sustainably.

The purpose of this study is to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of nongovernmental free vocational training in Vietnam and examine the perceived opportunities and barriers from the aspect of each actor in teaching Japanese cooking skills to disadvantaged youth in rural areas, using a case study design.

Secondary research questions are:

- 1) How do free vocational training providers contribute to Vietnamese society?

- 2) What kind of opportunities and barriers for what kind of people are there for nongovernmental free vocational training in Vietnam?
- 3) What is the potential impact of providing free vocational training, particularly Japanese cooking skills, to disadvantaged youth from rural areas in Vietnam?
- 4) What are the particular difficulties and disadvantages in providing free training of Japanese cooking skills to disadvantaged youth in Vietnam?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### Vocational training for developing countries

Vocational training is intended to develop skills that can be used in a specific occupation or job leading to higher productivity and earnings. The post-1990s trend towards emphasizing primary and basic education on the part of aid agencies has begun to be modified in recent years. The World Bank publicized the importance of establishing a balance with vocational education and training (VET) when expanding basic education (Johanson & Adams, 2004). Vocational training alone does not provide jobs or eradicate poverty. However, many researchers consider vocational training as one of the most effective solutions for poverty reduction in developing countries (Adams, Middleton, & Ziderman, 1992; Johanson & Adams, 2004; Okwuanaso, 2007).

Since vocational training consists of many educational areas such as secondary education, post-secondary education, and non-formal education – while stretching as far as teacher training as well (Yamada & Matsuda, 2007), its complexity and diversity including education and economics (Dougherty, 1989), the results have been mixed. Although vocational training is acknowledged to play an important role in supporting developing countries, the effectiveness on the whole has not been measured comprehensively. It should be evaluated in the context of each country (Dougherty, 1989) because VET systems differ from country to country and are delivered at different

levels in different types of institutions, including technical and vocational schools (both public and private), polytechnics, enterprises, and apprenticeship training centers.

### Vocational training in Vietnam

Despite a recent global economic slowdown, Vietnam has achieved an average annual growth rate of 6% between 2000 and 2012, resulting in a significant increase in living standards among the population with per capita income surpassing USD 1,000 in 2008 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012). Vietnam also became the 150th member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2006 and is becoming increasingly integrated into the world economy.

As Vietnam's economy continues to grow, so does the demand for skilled labor to support a number of increasingly important economic sectors. However, the labor force currently remains mostly unskilled. While Vietnam has more than one million people entering the labor market annually, Vietnam's Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) estimates that about 78% of the youth between the ages of 20-24 are underqualified for the job market (VNCI Policy Paper 15, 2009). While the number of vocational training institutions and students increased by 25% from 2005-2011, the current number of vocational training schools, given the market demand,

is still too low.

According to the study by the Uniterra program in 2011, Vietnam is facing on going challenges in meeting the country's growing demand for skilled labor. First, rural and disadvantaged youth in Vietnam have much more limited access to vocational and other forms of skills training. Second, the quality of programs provided by the majority of vocational training schools is lacking. These institutions continue to rely on outdated curricula that focus excessively on theory and not enough on practical skills training. In addition, the number of qualified teachers is not keeping pace with the growth in the number of vocational institutions. Qualified vocational teachers often lack technical and practical skills since much of their own training focused on theory rather than practical skills. Finally, vocational training school managers often lack experience in implementing income-generating measures to sustain and grow the schools or to develop partnerships with local enterprises to support student learning.

#### Nongovernmental free vocational training in Vietnam

There are two nongovernmental organizations providing free vocational training for disadvantaged youth in Vietnam, Hoa Sua School and KOTO. They have made great contributions to Vietnamese society. Hoa Sua School, created in 1994, is a

vocational training school in the hospitality sector that provides free employment training (Vietnamese and European cooking, embroidery and tailoring, and baking) for disadvantaged youth, namely orphans and street children raised by charity organizations. KOTO is a not-for-profit vocational training program teaching Vietnamese and western cooking skills. KOTO is not a school but a foreign capital company. KOTO was founded in 1999 in Hanoi and has evolved from a small sandwich shop run by nine former street children to a 120-seat restaurant staffed by ‘trainees’ who are studying in an internationally accredited hospitality training course.

Hoa Sua School and KOTO have similar approaches to supporting disadvantaged youth in recruiting students from rural areas or from the street by providing free vocational education and practical skills-based training with close links to the needs of local enterprises, and also providing support for food and living expenses and free accommodation. They also assist with job placement for graduating students.

International donors and partners have provided both organizations with up to date training programs including curricula and teacher training. Hoa Sua School has opened three restaurants, a mini-hotel, a bakery, a catering service, and an embroidery workshop. KOTO runs restaurants in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Those enterprises

enable each organization to fund its activities while providing students with practical job experience in a work environment. All profits from the businesses are invested back into the training programs and the budget for the good of the students.

According to Ms. Pham Thi Vy, founder of Hoa Sua School, approximately 90% of graduates of Hoa Sua School find work in international hotels and restaurants in Hanoi City, and some of them come back to teach at Hoa Sua School (personal communication, April, 2011). The School started with an annual enrollment of 20 students, and today trains over 200 youth annually in tourism and restaurant services. Hoa Sua School has trained over 6,000 students. Hoa Sua School has been filling the gap between skilled workers and labor demands in Vietnam's tourism and service sectors.

KOTO has grown rapidly in its few years of operation and annually trains up to 40 young persons to be chefs, as well as bar and service staff. KOTO Hanoi is now a 120-seat restaurant. Jimmy Pham, founder of KOTO stated in the graduation ceremony on May 7th, 2012 that KOTO has trained more than 400 street kids and boasts a 100% percent graduate employment rate; and 35% of the KOTO restaurant staff are former graduates. KOTO has an annual budget of two million USD and employs 75 staff in Vietnam and Australia (KOTO web page).



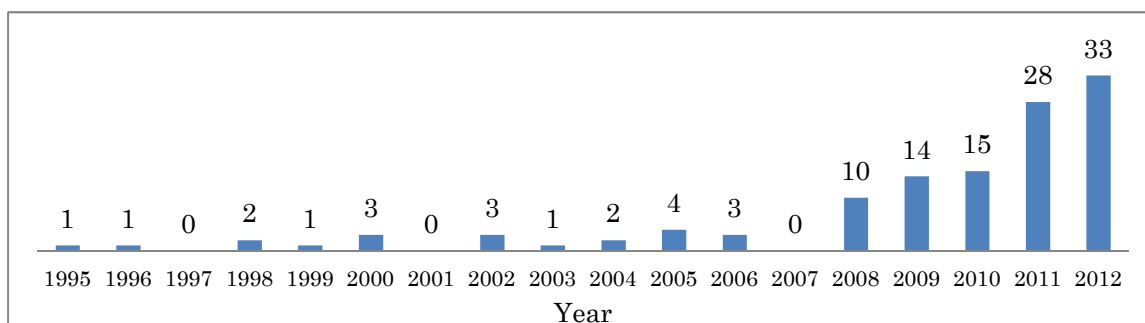
### The Focus of this Research

There are many studies about vocational training in Vietnam that stress the importance of private training institutions. VNCI policy paper analyzed the skill level of industrial technical laborers and the problems of the mismatch with employment qualifications in Vietnam, and argued that stronger levels of participation of the private sector in vocational training is necessary (2009). A German governmental project also stressed that partnerships between business sectors and vocational training institutions should be accelerated (2009). However, according to a large scale survey of Vietnam Development Forum (VDF) and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) jointly implemented with 76 enterprises in Vietnam, the business sector still sees the lack of a skill development system in Vietnamese technical training institutions (2010). These studies reviewed the private institution's training with a focus on the vocational training situation on the macro level and they don't focus on the narrow training field of Japanese cooking. In addition, the research targets industrial vocational trainings and does not deal with qualitative impact of the free training on the disadvantaged students.

In this research, along with seeing the successful experience of Hoa Sua School and KOTO, I narrow the research field to Japanese cooking, explore the impact on the

students who are provided free training, and consider how these schools dealt with obstacles. According to my personal research, there are more than 120 Japanese restaurants in Hanoi City and the trend is increasing rapidly (Figure 1). While Japanese food is being accepted gradually by the Vietnamese people and a lot of Japanese restaurants are needing good chefs, there have not been any training provider teaching Japanese cooking in Vietnam. Due to this lack of skilled human resources, most restaurants have difficulty in staff training and are depending on apprenticeship training in each of the restaurants. As discussed above, there are two free-training providers that have produced impressive results for the past ten years. I believe that it is meaningful to examine the value of nongovernmental free training for disadvantaged youth in Vietnam and how beneficial and how difficult it is to teach Japanese cooking skills to them.

Figure 1: The number of new Japanese restaurant opened in Hanoi city



## **RESEARCH/PRACTITIONER INQUIRY DESIGN**

This case study examines the opportunities and barriers of teaching Japanese cooking skills to Vietnamese disadvantaged youth in Hanoi, Vietnam. This geographical region was selected given the researcher's practicum position.

The data for this research was developed mainly from the communication and information gained through my work experience at my practicum site. As the research includes many kinds of people, I implemented in-depth interviews for each group, such as Japanese restaurant owners, Vietnamese chefs working in Japanese restaurants, free vocational training founders, and student candidates. Table 1 outlines the main questions for each group.

First, as an initial assessment, I visited more than 80 Japanese restaurants in Hanoi, and employed observations and interviews for the data collection. Based on the onsite research, I implemented in-depth interviews with 5 Japanese restaurant owners. The interviews followed an interview guide approach (Rallis & Rossman, 2003) with questions designed to explore certain issues on the opportunities and barriers in teaching Japanese cooking skills to disadvantaged students in rural areas. Individual interviews with Vietnamese chefs who are working for Japanese restaurants were also implemented in order to gain insights from the learner of Japanese cooking.

Secondly, I visited two free training providers in Hanoi to conduct semi-structured interviews with each founder to share their experiences in providing free training to disadvantaged youth. The research also employs observation of student's behavior in the classroom and the restaurants where students are doing on the job training.

Thirdly, I conducted individual interviews as a beneficiary assessment with 50 high school students and 5 parents who are living in rural, disadvantaged areas so that I could explore deeper perceptions on learning Japanese cooking skills.

Finally, the process of data gathering and analysis proceeded simultaneously and interactively. By using the observations and interviews, I analyzed the data descriptively about the opportunities and barriers in training Japanese cooking skills to disadvantaged youth.

Table 1. Main questions for in depth interviews

Japanese restaurant owner	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the opportunities and barriers for the staff to work in Japanese restaurant?</li> <li>• What will happen if you hire some disadvantaged youth who are skillful in Japanese cooking?</li> <li>• What kind of skills do you want the staff to have?</li> <li>• What are the difficulties in managing and training Vietnamese chefs?</li> </ul>
Vietnamese chefs in Japanese restaurant	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you study Japanese cooking skills?</li> <li>• What contributed to your working in a Japanese restaurant?</li> <li>• How do you feel about working in a Japanese restaurant?</li> </ul>
Free vocational training founder	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you recruit the students?</li> <li>• How do you manage the student's daily life?</li> <li>• What is the impact of your training on your students' life?</li> <li>• What do your students do after the graduation?</li> <li>• What are the advantages and disadvantages as a nongovernmental organization?</li> <li>• What are the difficulties in training disadvantaged youth?</li> </ul>
Student candidate	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why are you interested in studying Japanese cooking skills?</li> <li>• How do your parents feel if you study Japanese cooking?</li> <li>• What will be the barrier for you to study Japanese cooking skills?</li> </ul>

### Limitations

Since the data gathering method relied primarily upon interviews, it was possible that the researcher could not draw out the interviewees' true perceptions due to language differences and relationship issues. Another limitation is the narrow scope of this study, as there were only 5 Vietnamese chefs and 5 Japanese restaurant owners as participants representing a total of 120 Japanese restaurants in Hanoi, Vietnam. The study is clearly not exhaustive and generalizations beyond the study group need to be qualified. Finally, the research site was limited in Hanoi. Ho Chi Minh City is the largest city in Vietnam with many more Japanese restaurants. Historically, Hanoi and

Ho Chi Minh City have very different characteristics. The same research in Ho Chi Minh City could produce different results.

## PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Research findings

#### 1) The demographics of the participants

Table 2: Background of 5 Vietnamese chefs

Chef	Age	Gender	Years of experience in Japanese cooking	Educational background	Monthly Salary	Position
A	38	Female	20 years in 3 restaurants	Primary level of vocational training in cooking	USD600	Chief cook
B	28	Male	7 years in 5 restaurants	College graduate majored in cooking	USD500	Part time cook
C	23	Male	8 years in 5 restaurants and opened 2 restaurants (Closed now)	Junior high school graduate	0	Preparing to start a new food business
D	28	Female	8 years in 4 restaurants	Intermediate level of vocational training in cooking	USD500	Sushi chef
E	27	Male	6 years in 3 restaurants in Vietnam and Singapore	College graduate in food management in Singapore	USD450	Sushi chef

Table 3: Characteristics of 5 Japanese restaurants

Restaurant	Owner Nationality	Major customers	Number of kitchen staff	Year opened	Number of seats
A	Japan	Japanese 90%	22	1998	120
B	Japan	Vietnamese 60%	17	1999	90
C	Japan	Japanese 60%	9	2005	56
D	Vietnam	Vietnamese	10	2005	120

		60%			
E	Vietnam	Vietnamese 60%	6	2008	60

Table 4: 50 Student candidate's background

Theme	Category	Number of people
Gender	Male	25
	Female	25
Age	21 years old	1
	19 years old	1
	18 years old	46
	16 years old	2
Research area	Hanoi City	9
	Hai Duong province	25
	Phu Tho province	2
	Vinh Phuc Province	13
	Other	1
Status	High school student	46
	Staying at orphanage	1
	Working	3
Parents job	Farming	40
	Other	5
	No parents	5
Future plan	Wants to enter university	17
	Wants to enter college	10
	Wants to study skills	6
	Help parents work	3
	Other	14

Table 5: Training models of Hoa Sua School and KOTO

	Hoa Sua School	KOTO
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Main training course	Cooking, Bakery, Tailoring	Cooking
Training license type	Intermediate level of vocational training school	Primary level of vocational training center and 100% of private capital company.
The number of students studying	About 200	100
Campus	Hanoi	Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city
How to recruit students	Make contact with local government offices. When the students are recommended, all recommended students are accepted.	Announced through their network. Then, implement test, interview, and make home visit. The pass rate is about 25 %.
Accommodation	Provide free accommodation on campus	Provide free accommodation off campus
Work place after the graduation	Own enterprises (restaurant, café, bakery shop, tailoring shop)	Own restaurant, some other hotels and restaurants in Hanoi. Some graduates are working abroad, Australia and United Arab Emirates.
Other differentiations	Have soccer field and some other sports facilities.	Provides English skills, cooking skills and soft skills

## **Analysis**

### **Opportunities**

Five opportunities for Japanese restaurant owners emerged from the interviews with the restaurant owners and the Vietnamese chefs (see Table 6).

Table 6: Opportunities for Japanese restaurant owners

No	Categories	Total number of interviewees of Table 3 referring to category
1	Number of Japanese restaurant is increasing	5 (A, B, C, D, E)
2	Sincerity	4 (A, B, C, E)
3	Vietnamese general characteristics	3 (A, B, C)
4	Having a good memory	3 (A, B, C)
5	Economic development	2 (B, D)

**Opportunity 1: The number of Japanese restaurant is increasing rapidly**

As all of the Japanese restaurant owners mentioned, the increasing number of Japanese restaurant is the most significant opportunity for providing Japanese cooking training. The Japanese food industry in Hanoi started in 1995 when the first Japanese restaurant opened. As more new Japanese restaurants opened gradually over the next ten years, the number of Vietnamese chefs working in Japanese restaurants also increased. Since the Vietnamese people have an independent spirit, after 2006, they started to quit these restaurants and opened their own restaurants. In addition, considering that two large Japanese restaurant chains opened new restaurants in 2012, the Japanese food industry in Japan has a great interest in the business in the Vietnamese market. I suppose this is partly because of the economic decline in the Japanese market; and this trend is expected to escalate in the next five to ten years.

One restaurant owner highlighted that the majority of the customers were Japanese 5 years ago but Japanese food is increasingly becoming accepted year by year by the Vietnamese people, and recently, 60% of the customers were local Vietnamese residents, which is encouraging Vietnamese chefs to open their own restaurants and draw customers. In fact, among the 80 restaurants I visited, 72% (58 restaurants) of the restaurants are owned and managed by Vietnamese and 27% (22 restaurants) are managed by Japanese. Although this environment is a huge challenge for existing Japanese restaurant owners, it is a major advantage for the people who set on becoming Japanese cooking chefs and a substantial opportunity for a training provider.

### **Opportunity 2: High salary and quick promotion**

The results of interviews with Vietnamese chefs showed that they were treated very well considering their age, their educational backgrounds, their years of experiences, and their skills. Their salary is as high as a recent university graduate. I found through talking with them that they had no difficulty in finding a new job and their salaries and positions rose consistently. It appears that more restaurants have opened in a short period compared with the number of chefs in Hanoi. As a result, some restaurants cannot retain enough chefs contributing to an inflation of chef's salary. A lot

of chefs are often headhunted. Based on this situation, if disadvantaged youth were trained in Japanese cooking skills effectively, they would be welcomed and well-treated by the restaurants.

### **Opportunity 3: No competition**

There is no educational institution teaching Japanese cooking in Vietnam. All of the Vietnamese chefs who were interviewed learned skills from Japanese head chefs at the restaurant through apprenticeship training in the early days of their career. If the disadvantaged youth were trained in Japanese cooking skills, they would be the first generation of competitive and skilled chefs with systematic knowledge of Japanese cooking. Japanese cooking training is an uncultivated market and easy to enter for a new training provider. In fact, although some Japanese restaurants recruited some students from Hoa Sua School, KOTO and other cooking training schools, the students didn't study Japanese cooking and needed to learn the basics through apprenticeship trainings.

### **Opportunity 4: General characteristics of Vietnamese**

The Japanese restaurant owners valued some general Vietnamese

characteristics such as sincerity, good with hands, and having a good memory. These strengths are often mentioned by foreigners in other areas like the car industry, homebuilding industry, beauty business, and computer engineering. Especially, since Japanese chefs are required to do detailed and delicate work, hand dexterity is a huge advantage.

### **Opportunity 5: Economic development**

Economic development and “golden age of population pyramid” were not mentioned often during the research. It might be because Japanese cooking is still a small niche industry, it is too early to think about a macro economic perspective, and they are facing a lot of issues. However, economic development in Vietnam will undoubtedly attract many food industries in Japan and bring the efficiencies in business such as a more effective distribution system. In addition, the more people enter the labor market, the easier it will be for a training provider to find good students or staff.

### **Barriers**

The interviewees also identified five barriers (see Table 7).

Table 7: Barriers for Japanese restaurant owners

No	Categories	Total number of interviewees in Table 3 referring to category
1	Sense of sanitation	5 (A, B, C, D, E)
2	Behavior in working	4 (A, B, C, D)
3	Job hopping	3 (A, B, C)
4	Language	2 ( B, C)
5	Lack of basic cooking knowledge	1 (A)

**Barrier 1: Sense of sanitation**

To become a Japanese cooking chef, the student must be very sensitive about food sanitation. I heard this message many times through talking with owners and chefs. This is because Japanese food uses raw fish and places an extremely high value on the freshness of the food. Given these concerns, the sense of sanitation of disadvantaged youth in remote areas is definitely hard to change. When I visited 5 student candidate’s houses, I found there were few soaps in the toilet or kitchen, they cut vegetables and meats on the floor, and eat sitting on the floor. Additionally, I noticed that they didn’t take a bath every day and wore the same clothes for several days.

**Barrier 2: Behavior change**

The second most significant barrier in teaching Japanese cooking skills that

interviewees identified is behavior on the job and a commitment to learning. The owners are having difficulty in teaching punctuality and stopping use of cell phone or private conversations with coworkers during the work. The owners were sometimes frustrated when the chef didn't do exactly what they were taught.

The way of teaching is another problem. Apprenticeship training in Japanese restaurants in Japan is strict. Senior chefs often punch and kick younger chefs when teaching skills. One Japanese owner told me that a few chefs quit because their pride was hurt immediately after they were hit on the hand or head when they made mistakes. The owner changed his way of communicating with the staff after that experience. Interestingly, a few owners highlighted that this characteristic depends on the trainees' hometown. They stated the young people in Hanoi don't work hard, but the people from rural areas work patiently. Thus, they mentioned that recruiting disadvantaged youth from rural areas should be effective.

### **Barrier 3: Job hopping**

Three owners referred to job hopping as a worrisome problem. The Vietnamese chefs cited many reasons for the quick turnover, such as to pursue more salary (even if the increase was only USD 0.5/month), location of the restaurant (closer to home),

reluctance to work late after 22:00, a dispute with the owner, being bullied by coworkers, etc. Even if a chef is trained in the necessary skills in a short period of time, if he then jumps from restaurant to restaurant, the skills, knowledge, and experience will not be retained. The owners wish that the young chefs would work for a long time for the restaurant as well as for the chefs, however the owners said that the trainees tend to prioritize short term interests or preferences like higher salary rather than long term skill development.

#### **Barrier 4: Language**

Language can be a barrier at Japanese owned restaurants. It is difficult for Japanese owners to teach skills in Vietnamese and almost all the Vietnamese chefs cannot speak Japanese. Furthermore, language problems affect the work. I observed more Japanese customers preferring to sit at the sushi bar where they expected to have a conversation with the staff. Among 80 restaurants I visited, 77% (62 restaurants) had a sushi bar and almost every restaurant had a few staff in charge at the sushi bar. However, the staff at the sushi bar rarely had conversations with the customers.

#### **Barrier 5: Lack of basic Japanese cooking knowledge**



Through the interviews with disadvantaged students in remote areas, I found that, in general, they were interested in Japanese cooking because they often cook at home for their families since their parents work at the farm until late. However, their perception of cooking is completely different from the Japanese way of cooking. The students, who have never seen Japanese food, will need to struggle to learn the differences one by one. A student from a remote area might cause an unexpected event. One Japanese owner narrated a surprising story that a young chef was washing the whole body of electric rice cooker in water in the sink. He was told to “wash the cooker.”

Additional barriers emerged from the interviews with school directors and students.

#### **Barrier 6: Financial sustainability**

As a private free vocational training provider, the most significant challenge is the financial sustainability of the school. Major financial resources of Hoa Sua School and KOTO are international donors. However, along with the economic development, international development agencies are moving from Vietnam to other poorer countries. The director of KOTO mentioned that his school was supported mainly by Australians

now but he desired more financial assistance from Vietnamese and the Vietnam government.

A rapid rise in prices in Vietnam is another big issue. The inflation rate in Vietnam in 2012 was 9.1%. All 5 Japanese restaurants raised their prices for every dish last year since material costs soared. This trend is very serious for Japanese cooking trainer. Using special seasoning and importing raw fish from Japan or Thailand, the material cost of Japanese foods is much more expensive than other international foods. In addition, Japanese cooking needs special tools and uses a unique set of knives which cannot be found in Vietnam and must be bought in Japan or Thailand. If the training provider supports free accommodations and daily food for disadvantaged students like Hoa Sua School and KOTO, the initial investment and operating costs for the training would be quite expensive.

The more inflation proceeds, the more personnel expense rises. Although Hoa Sua School and KOTO have highly trained staff members who are mainly graduates of the school, there are staffing issues with regards to teacher salaries. Recent years have seen a growth in opportunities for employment for tourism and service sector educators with international enterprises and other private vocational training institutions offering higher salaries. As a result, salaries for teachers at public-funded institutions have also

increased. Therefore, even though teachers believe strongly in the charitable goals of the organization, a number of Hoa Sua School and KOTO teachers are facing increasingly difficult decisions whether or not to move to higher paying opportunities.

### **Barrier 7: Higher education-oriented society**

Similar to most Asian countries, Vietnam is a society in which there is an overemphasis on educational qualifications. As Table 4 outlined, more than 50% of the student candidates want to pursue higher education. In general, since university graduates have higher salaries than vocational school graduates, more and more people are pursuing higher education. Most parents I have met mentioned that if their children graduate from college, they would get a stable job such as working in national and private banks, or foreign-investment companies. The major industry in Vietnam is agriculture, which is unstable because it is affected largely by changes in the weather. It is reasonable that most of the farmers hope that their children do not do the same job and that they attain more secure employment. For these reasons, with the continued rapid rise of income levels and improving living standards, more people are proactively trying to enter universities than before. The students studying practical skills in vocational schools are seen as being at low educational levels.

### **Barrier 8: Food culture**

There are number of differences in the food culture between Vietnam and Japan such as seasoning and materials, the way of cooking, the use of different types of dishes, table manners, tools and cooking devices and so on. The sense of taste is also to be considered. A few owners pointed out some Vietnamese chefs don't taste during cooking because they don't like Japanese food's flavor. Indeed, this depends on the person. While some Vietnamese chefs like to eat raw fish, some cannot tolerate it.

### **Barrier 9: Complexity of business**

A training provider has many factors to deal with besides training. A provider must deal with licensing, taxes, health care, insurance, and bookkeeping. It is very hard to tackle these various areas with limited human resources. KOTO's manager highlighted this difficulty by saying that, when she worked in a big accounting firm, she just focused on her assigned work, however, in KOTO, she must do "everything" (personal conversation, December, 2012). KOTO is supported 100% by private capital. They always have difficulty in licensing and real estate matters. Conversely, Hoa Sua School is supported by the government and was issued an educational license and

provided land and buildings for classrooms, office, workshops, and student dormitories by some international government donors. In addition, each administrative procedure takes much longer time in Vietnam than developed countries since Vietnamese law and government policy often change resulting in frequent different treatment by the officers.

There are remaining restrictions and opaqueness in the regulations related to the entry of private vocational training providers. Licensing provisions for establishing non-public higher education institutions are still unclear and at times contradictory. These procedures were established over time by the government to guarantee minimum academic and public safety requirements but have become increasingly complex and contradictory. Basically, private training schools have the flexibility to change the curriculum. However, the government investigates schools irregularly and presses to change the curriculum without notice, though the government policy on the content of training is vague.

#### **Barrier 10: Care for the students and parents**

According to the training provider's experience, students from remote areas often feel lonely and become homesick while living in Hanoi. Some students get depressed and unmotivated to study. Also, there are some difficulties in managing

students because of racial discrimination, particularly between people from the northern and southern parts of Vietnam. This is because of political history. For these reasons, Hoa Sua School and KOTO have a female staff member for each student's dormitory who takes the role of their mother, plus social workers and part-time mental health care consultants in the school.

It is necessary for a training provider to let the parents understand what is being offered before accepting the children as students. Parents mentioned that they were sad living away from their children. A big city like Hanoi was full of allurements and they wanted their children to help with the housework. Providing free vocational training, in particular, is sometimes regarded as a suspicious offer since there are many children that have been cheated and trafficked in remote areas for many years.

## **DISCUSSION**

### Conclusions

Despite some critical barriers and challenges in teaching Japanese cooking skills to disadvantaged youth in Vietnam, this research has provided some positive insights into the value of free vocational training offered by a nongovernmental organization. Given the experiences and the successes of Hoa Sua School and KOTO, the greatest value of free vocational training for disadvantaged youth is to provide employment opportunity by teaching skills. Furthermore, the skills will become more valuable if the skills are marketable, are in great demand, and there is no other school offering the training. Hoa Sua School was quick to start service and hospitality training cooperating with European partners and KOTO is teaching soft skills like communication and team work besides teaching cooking skills, which are not implemented in any other vocational schools.

Having financial hindrances as a major challenge, the advantage of a nongovernmental training provider is that it can adjust to market needs and the shifting economic situation to cultivate a small niche market by maneuvering effectively. As this study indicates, it is necessary to look at the local needs closely and take in the voices from the people. In this study, it was found that cooking skills were as important to

restaurant owners as care for sanitation and a willingness to work and learn. Therefore, a training provider should pay as much attention to the attitudes of the students as to learning the required skill. KOTO does offer a class in language and communication.

Because teaching Japanese cooking skills is a new market, it is suitable for nongovernmental training provider to start work on. As this research highlighted, it is meaningful and socially significant to teach Japanese cooking skills to disadvantaged youth as Vietnamese chefs are being paid very well.

I believe the value of free vocational training is not only for the disadvantaged youth. There is one comment that I cannot get out of my mind, which Jimmy, the founder of KOTO, expressed at the last conversation, “It is worth doing” (June, 2012). Indeed, this refers to providing free training and the importance of helping disadvantaged youth. However, I sensed the hidden message which is doing this is also valuable for the people to provide training.

### Practical applicability

Up to now, the research on vocational training mainly focuses on explaining and reporting the national projects in the context of Official Development Assistance (ODA). As far as I know, there is no study about nongovernmental free vocational



training or training in Vietnam and this is the significance of this research. As the Vietnam government is paying attention to vocational training, human resource development is an urgent issue. There will be more educational institutions with foreign and domestic capital. This study will help the educators and school managers to understand the Vietnamese training situation. It would be great if more charitable organizations would help vocational training for disadvantaged people in Vietnam.

#### Recommendations for further research

This study has focused on the situation in Vietnam, particularly in Hanoi city. It is necessary to look at training models and possibilities in other cities in Vietnam and internationally. Furthermore, successful models and experiences in both Vietnam and internationally need to be shared.

My next step of inquiry would be finding other skills which will provide more various opportunities to disadvantaged youth. For example, hair cutting skills would be suitable as the beauty industry is booming in cities. The number of cars is increasing rapidly and a lot of car repair shops need skillful mechanics. Fortunately, Vietnam is in the middle of rapid economic development and more and more jobs are being created and along with this, specific skills will be necessary. I believe to take advantage of this

trend of the time and share the opportunity with disadvantaged people would be the key for further development of Vietnam.

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