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**Cooperation between Tourism Enterprises and Regional Universities in the North of Vietnam: A Case Study of Thai Nguyen University of Sciences**

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**Abstract**

According to Langvinniene and Daunoraviciute (2015), the hospitality industry, which has great potential to encourage the growth of the economy, enhance the number of new careers, and improve the social environment, is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. In the context of Vietnam, tourism has become one of the major contributors to the economic value of the Gross Domestic Product (TITC, 2022). However, in the current tourism and hospitality industry, the top challenge lies in the lacking attraction and retention of qualified and skilled employees (Mohammed & Rashid 2016). To develop sustainable tourism for the region and whole nation and to become a spearhead economic sector, it is necessary to develop human resources. This source of tourism labor will meet high-quality requirements in terms of degree and integration. Through different cooperating models between Thai Nguyen University of Sciences (TNUS) and tourism enterprises, This research aims to summarize collaborating modes between educational institutions and tourism enterprises in training students to satisfy requirements in the reality.

**Keywords:** cooperation, regional university, businesses, tourism, human resource

**1. Introduction**

According to the Statistics of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, in 2019, Vietnam has over 2.5 million employees working in the tourism industry, of which 860,000 are direct labor, 45% are trained, 20% are not while 35% are in others field, it is facing a shortage in both the quantity and quality of human resources for tourism and enterprises. This shortage becomes even more urgent after Vietnam is rapidly integrating with the region and the world and has just joined the Trans-pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), which committed tourism is one eight key sectors within the framework of the ASEAN Economic Community. Tourism enterprises require that human resources must ensure skills, profession and proficiency in using tourism management software and technologies. Therefore, tourism training institutions need to quickly approach and apply applications of advance technology, artificial intelligence in teaching and practicing. There is evidence to show that university as a whole have much to gain from collaboration with tourism enterprises, such as: improving curriculum design, training and employment opportunities for students and creating a positive image of the business in the school and community (Dickerson and Kline (2008).

TNUS is a regional university providing multi-disciplinary training, conducts scientific research and technology transfer, contributing effectively to the development of the Midlands, Northern

Mountainous areas and the whole country. Tourism and hospitality education is an ever-merging field in TNUS in terms of both the increase in number of programs and in student enrollment. These programs focus on preparing students for a career in the industry after graduation. Moreover, it is the combination of theory and practice that makes the student a success, and that is why the program mandates internship in the field before graduation. Through this research, We presents some types of cooperating model, analyses the reality of cooperation between tourism enterprises and TNUS. Research results are expected to contribute theoretically and practically, providing necessary implications to make development cooperation more effective.

## **2. Literature review**

Schools-Business cooperation was proposed by the German philosopher Willhelm Humboldt in the 1810s (Ngo Bao Chau, 2010). He emphasized that universities evolve from the basic functions of teaching and research, and commercialization where the partnership with the industry is the most important element (Humboldtian model of higher education). This cooperation is understood as direct or indirect interactions, personal or non-personal transactions between educational institutions and businesses to benefit the parties which includes many elements from human resources involved (academic staff, students, company and employees).

David and Roger Johnson and Edythe Johnson Holubec (1994) reinforce the cooperative learning theories found in *Circles of Learning: Cooperation in the Classroom* and expand those theories to include the school and school district. They emphasize that cooperation is more than a seating arrangement, that educators must attend to these essential components:

- Positive interdependence
- Individual accountability/personal responsibility
- Face-to-face promotive interaction
- Interpersonal and small-group skills
- Group processing

To be more precise, the alliance education program provides work integrated learning experiences (Martin et al. 2010) that would help students to bridge the gap between their academic and professional career.

For this study, the collaboration education specifically focuses on the tourism training program, where university and industry partners share resources and cooperative together.

## **3. Methodology and Data**

- Secondary data analysis: The author collected surveys, official records, official statistics, academic studies, and archival data repositories in fields of tourism and hospitality industry, thereby analyzing the current situation, predicting trends on the research.

- Qualitative Research: are designed to understand the behavior and perception of the school leaders and board of manager about the reality of university and tourism enterprises cooperation, including observations, one-on-one interviews, case study research, focus groups, ethnographic research, phenomenology, and grounded theory. We conveyed the survey among tourism

enterprises signing cooperation agreement with TNUS in a period of three months (April-June 2022). The questionnaire was distributed directly or by email to 65 employers, 25 lecturers, 412 students with the response rate of 84%. We investigated the level of cooperation between TNUS and tourism enterprises is from the perspective of business companies, lecturers and students.

### **3. Research Results and Discussion**

#### *3.1. Universities-Business cooperation (UBC)*

UBC is a relationship in flux, reflecting issues specific to the transition from an industrial to a knowledge society (LSE enterprise, 2013). UBC is undergoing a transformation from a dyadic university-business relationship, aimed at solving firm problems, sourcing new products or providing an outlet for academic research, to a triadic university industry-government relationship that maintains these objectives, while incorporating new features, such as contribution to economic and social development at the national, regional and local levels, responsiveness to societal concerns and new forms of student involvement in entrepreneurial activities.

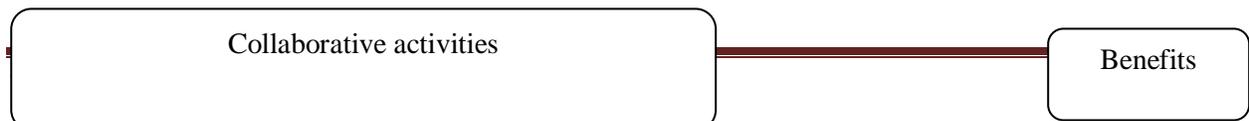
In developing economies, university-industry collaboration tends to be more informal, focuses on firm's recruitment of university graduates, for staffing, internship and consulting, curricula development to improve undergraduate and graduate studies, student internship and so on (Boahin 2018).

According to Nguyen Thi Thu Hoa (2020), the benefit of collaboration is identified by all participants such as university, hospitality industry and students. Benefits accrue to university in collaboration with industrial partners include the following, such as: improve curriculum design or service to the community and enhancement of university's reputation. Students benefit from university and hospitality industry relationships by developing attitude, knowledge and understanding of particular subjects. This study also found that tourism bussiness partners would like to continue the partnership with the universities because they receive benefits of new energetic employees then enhance reputation by becoming more social responsible business.

#### *3.2. Forms of Universities-Business cooperation*

Cooperation between schools and businesses includes forms of direct or indirect interaction to support each other for the benefit. Therefore, this relation could be viewed from two perspective: Universities and Business (Arthur R. Taylor, 2017).

The business perspective: From the point of view of the business, the cooperation helps build businesses and meet long-term employment goals, such as assessing student's ability to work both independently and as part of a new team then improving their brand image. Each year, businesses have demand for labor recruitment, the cooperation with universities will create favorable conditions for businesses. Otherwise, business might get benefit by access scientific research results from higher education then applied them in their production activities.



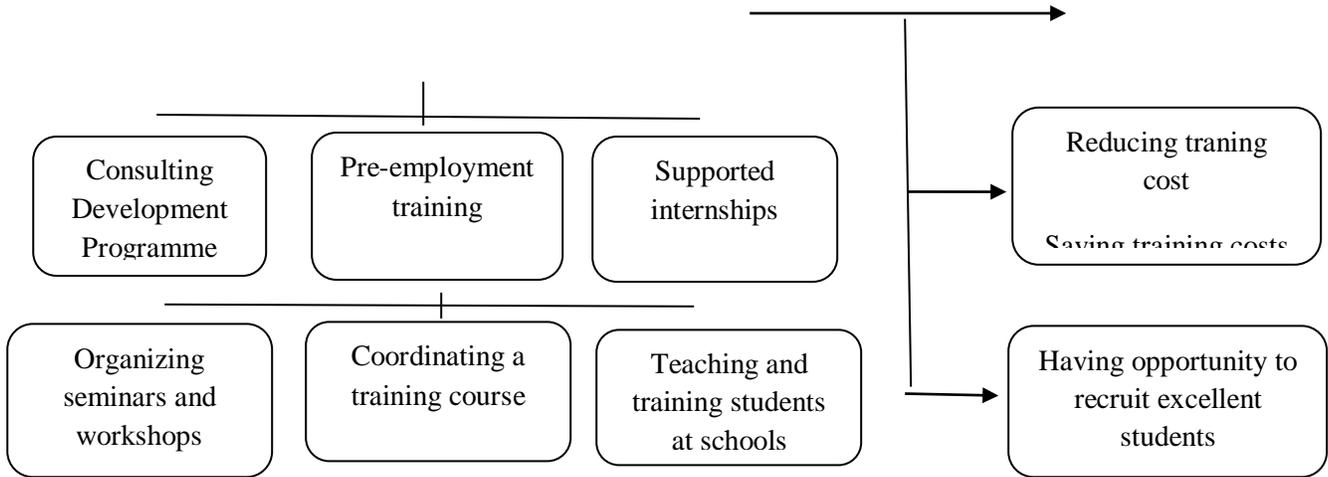


Diagram 1. Forms cooperation by the business perspective

The university perspective: The advantages of working hand in hand with businesses begins for students. Along the way, it is essential that students gain initial company experience and work out their preferences through internships.

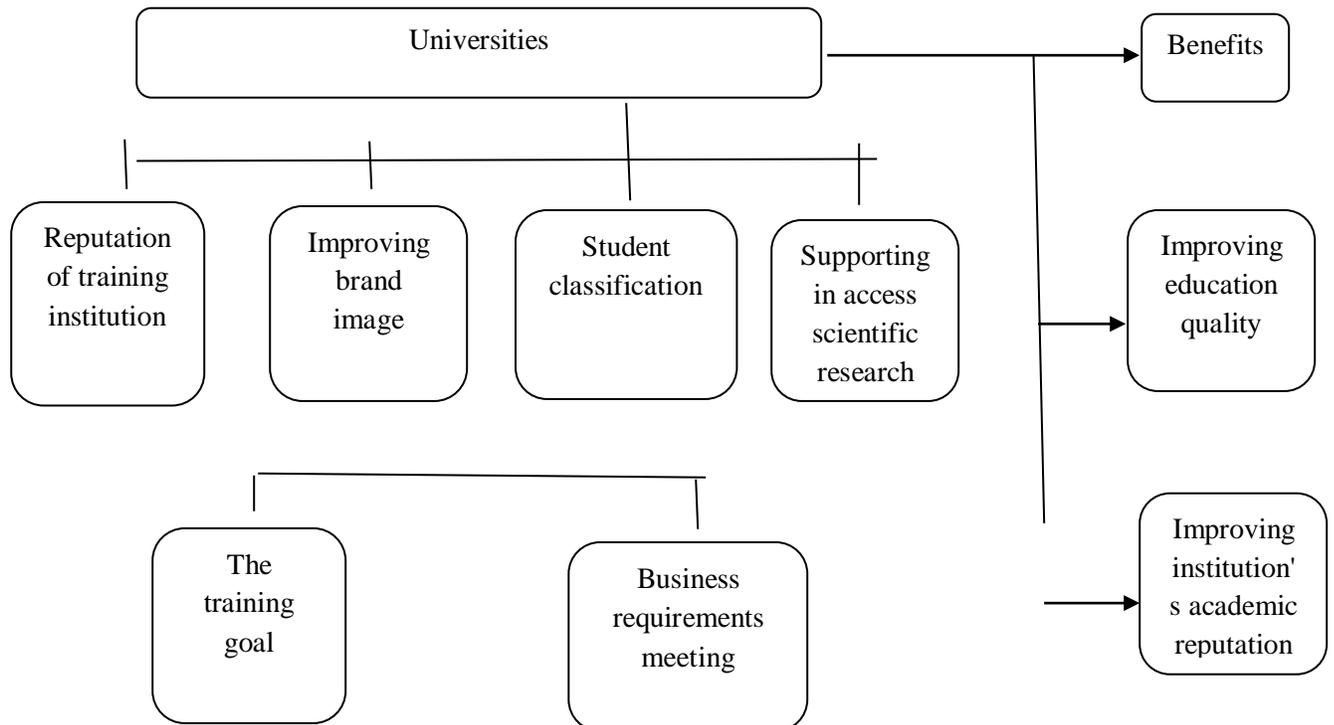


Diagram 2. Forms cooperation by the university perspective  
(Source: according to the auther group)

In the human resource training process, university invites managers, recruiters, experts to participate in assessing student ability and training program content. After that, students participate in internships at enterprises. Students engage in seeing and experiencing real workstations, plants, machines, systems, assembly lines, and interact with highly trained and experienced personnel (Mohammed, A.A., & Rashid, B. (2016).

### *3.3. Cooperation between the TNUS and tourism enterprises*

The TNUS has the missions to train high-quality human resources at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels; promote scientific research; implement the transfer of technology in the field of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities in order to serve the achievements of industrialization and modernization of the Northern midland and mountainous areas and the whole country. Faculty of Tourism at The TNUS was officially established on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2018, under the Decision No. 377 QD/TC-HC of the Rector of The TNUS. The Faculty has 25 full-time officials and lecturers. The Faculty of Tourism is made up of 2 divisions: Tourism, Tourism and Travel Services Management. The Faculty has been training 11 courses with the number of nearly 1000 graduates.

At present, The Faculty of Tourism is training more than 400 students with 5 training programs: Travel Operation Management, Hospitality Management, Tourguide, Restaurant and Hotel, Luxury Hotels & Resorts Management. With a training philosophy associated with practice, the Faculty has trained students who are capable of meeting the increasingly demanding labor requirements of businesses. For years, the TNUS has always had a strategic plan to develop the Faculty of Tourism in order to become institution's academic reputation in tourism sector.

Up to now, forms of Universities-Business cooperation between The TNUS and tourism enterprises include: Internship Program; Career Tour; School Career Expo; Visiting Lecturer.

- *Internship Program*: It is a professional learning experience that offers meaningful, practical work related to a student's field of study or career interest. An internship gives a student the opportunity for career exploration and development, and to learn new skills. It offers the employer the opportunity to bring new ideas and energy into the workplace, develop talent and potentially build a pipeline for future full-time employees.

The TNUS signed strategic cooperation agreement with more than 50 tourism enterprises, such as: Vingroup Joint Stock Company, Viet Global tour, Da Huong Tourist, Hasu International Tourism & Events Co., Ltd, Minh Hoang International Tourism Joint Stock Company, Au Lac International Tourism Co., Ltd, Kim Thai Hotel, Habana Hotel, etc. For students of Travel operation division who participated in practice skills like designing tour, guiding, sale tour, v.v. while those in hospitality division access at different departments, such as: Front Office Department, Housekeeping Department, Food and Beverage Service Department, Human Resources (HR) Department, Sales and Marketing Department, etc.

An intern works at tourism enterprises for a fixed period of time - usually three months and will have a part-time working at the office for just a few days or hours per week. During time internship at enterprises, students are recognized for their contribution as a part-time employee, and even receive salary due to the incentive compensation of each company. At the end of the

internship, students have to finish an internship report under the guide of their instructor. At the same time, students will be received an internship performance review from tourism enterprise. Along with the quality of the internship report, the assessment of the tourism enterprise accounts for 30% of the total score.

- *Career Tour*: It is a day trip to visit tour operators, travel agencies, restaurant, resort, hotels from 3 – 5 star within or outside Thai Nguyen city. Career tour is implemented in subjects, such as: Introduction to Tourism, Front office management, Room Division Management, Career Practice etc. When join in these tours, students have opportunity to listen to the sharing of leaders in enterprises about what they often expect their employees, qualities of a great hospitality employee, skills and competencies with job positions in the tourism industry (tour guide, tour operator, hotel receptionist, room attendant, bartender, etc). When the tour finishes, students have to complete a report, then instructor will evaluate the student's results.

- *School Career Expo*: This is an event whereby a school hosts representatives from business, industry and/or community to highlight some examples of what is currently available to their students beyond secondary school. School Career Expos may assist in general career planning to help inform young people about possible future opportunities and therefore, help inform subject selections and the 'Set Plan' process. Career counseling sessions and career expo/job fair are usually held at the TNUS, in March or April before the fourth year students take the graduation exam. On this day, students have opportunity to interact with experts, leadership and manager from tourism enterprises meanwhile tourism employers directly meet a large number of candidates and select the best ones for their recruitment.

- *Visiting Lecturer*: According to Education Law 2019, article 71 “*Visiting teaching is the act where educational institutions invite persons meeting criteria stipulated in Article 67 of this Law to conduct teaching. Persons invited to conduct teaching by educational institutions are called visiting teachers or visiting lecturers*”. In this model, the TNUS approves the proposal of the Faculty of Tourism, then invites visiting lecturers who are experts, scientists and businessmen to teach specialized subjects in the curriculum, such as: Hospitality Business Management, Sale in Hospitality Business, Marketing for Travel Agencies, Human Resources Management, Tourist Destination Management, Service Quality Management (Hotel Industry).

### **3.4. General Assessment**

Table 1. Level of cooperation between the University of Sciences and tourism enterprises from the businesses' point of view – Opinions on the statement: “Cooperation between the TNUS and tourism enterprises is sufficient”

Opinions	Response percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	11.1	6
Disagree	53.7	29
agree	29.6	16
Strongly agree	5.6	3
Don't know	0	0
<b>Total</b>	100	54

(Source: own survey)

More than 50 % of the businesses think that the cooperation is not sufficient. As the results of the survey are not positive we were interested in the factors that would encourage the cooperation between the TNUS and tourism enterprises. The results are shown in the table 2.

Table 2. Motivation factors to make the business-university cooperation more intensive

Motivation factor	Response percent	Response Count
Better initiative of the universities	88.9	48/54
Better support of the government	66.7	36/54
Better possibilities of company publicity on the university	31.4	17/54
Possibility to hire university graduates	57.4	31/54
Possibility to apply the results of research	16.7	9/54
We do not have an interest to cooperate with the universities	0	0

(Source: own survey)

66.7 % of the tourism enterprises would be motivated with the government support of their cooperation with the universities. 88.9 % of them would prefer better initiative of the universities. No businesses (15,7 %) does not have any interest to cooperate with the universities.

We compared the opinions of employers with the opinions of students and teachers on the level of cooperation of the tourism enterprises and Universities of Sciences:

Table 3. Level of cooperation between the University or Sciences and tourism enterprises from the lecturers and students’ point of view – Opinions on the statement: “Cooperation between the TNUS and tourism enterprises is sufficient”

Opinions	Lecturers view		Student view	
	Response percent	Response Count	Response percent	Response Count
Strongly disagree	8	2	7.8	27
Disagree	20	5	17.6	61
agree	48	12	34.3	119
Strongly agree	24	6	30.1	104
Don’t know	0	0	10.2	35
<b>Total</b>	100	25	100	346

(Source: own survey)

While more than 40 % of teachers agree that the cooperation is sufficient, the figure of students is only 34.3%. The reason of this difference may be in a different perception or it might be caused by insufficient information that students have about the cooperation of their university with the private companies. Even the fact that 10.2 % of the students do not know to evaluate the level of the cooperation may indicate that the problem is in the lack of information.

*3.5. Some recommendations*

To build the strategic university-business partnership policy: It is necessary to re-establish a department in charge of cooperation. At present, this task is mainly done by the private relation of lecturers themselves, so it is still spontaneous and unprofessional. Therefore, it is proposed to set up and epartment that does not do part-time work, has foreign languages, capabilities in connecting the with tourism enterprises.

According to our survey the perception of the quality of university-business cooperation varies among tourism enterprises, lecturers and students. So, We recommend to inform regularly the students about the possibilities of cooperation with the companies by organizing more workshops, conferences, seminars and job fair. To understand the needs of each party, effective communication is necessary.

For tourism enterprises, they need to strengthen communication in recruiting, hire graduates with long-term contracts and good remuneration, not just short-term during peak season. In economic theory, investments in education of the employees are the most common assessment of the investment in connection with the analysis of investment in human capital. By this point, tourism enterprises should invest in general human capital, which is an investment into specific or general training course that enables acquisition of general knowledge usable in various companies.

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