

Labor Migration of High-Quality Human Resources in Hue City Vietnam: Causes and Impact and Policy Orientation

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ABSTRACT

Hue City, the cultural and educational center of Central Vietnam, is facing an increasing migration of high-quality human resources (HLHR). This article analyzes the causes, impacts, and proposes policy directions to retain and attract HLHR. We use document analysis, statistical data, and expert interviews. The results indicate that income disparities, career opportunities, and social infrastructure are important factors leading to migration. The impacts include the lack of creative human resources and increasing regional development disparities. From there, the article proposes policy solutions on infrastructure, technology, and career support to retain and attract intellectual human resources for Hue City, Vietnam.

Keywords: Labor migration, human resources, high quality, policy orientation, Hue

INTRODUCTION

Hue City is a major cultural, educational, and medical center of the Central region of Vietnam. With its inherent potential and position such as the system of historical and cultural relics of the Nguyen Dynasty recognized by UNESCO as a world cultural heritage, Hue Central Hospital, Hue University (with 8 member universities, 4 affiliated faculties) have established Hue as an important geopolitical, cultural, educational, medical, and scientific and technological center of Vietnam. However, in recent years, the migration of high-quality human resources from Hue to big cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City or abroad is increasing rapidly. This shift not only loses key labor resources but also reduces the innovation and attractiveness of the central city of Hue in the sustainable development strategy. Researching the causes and consequences of NNLCLC migration, thereby proposing policies to retain and attract this resource, is extremely urgent (Dang & Tacoli, 2018).

THEORETICAL BASIS AND RESEARCH METHODS

This study is based on theories of labor migration, especially the Push-Pull model (Lee, 1966), in which push factors such as limited working environment and low income push workers to leave; conversely, pull factors from large urban areas are the driving force to attract high-quality resources (World Bank, 2016). In addition, perspectives on sustainable development emphasize the central role of people in development strategies (UNDP, 2022).

The research method of the article is deployed according to three main approaches to ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of the data.

Firstly, the authors conducted a secondary document analysis including research reports, academic papers, scientific articles, policy documents, and statistics from domestic and foreign organizations such as the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, the World Bank, UNDP, OECD and studies by scholars such as Dang Nguyen Anh, Nguyen Van Cuong, and Linh & Van. This method helps to systematize and synthesize theoretical frameworks, current situations and international experiences as a basis for analysis.

Second, the research team applied quantitative analysis methods by exploiting databases from the General Statistics Office, the National Labor Force Survey, and the Thua Thien Hue Provincial Statistical Yearbook for the period 2015 - 2022. The exploited indicators include: the rate of graduates working locally, the income gap between regions, and the actual migration flow of workers with university degrees or higher. The data were processed and compared to clarify the trend of high-quality labor migration.

Third, the paper uses a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with 15 respondents, including policy makers, officials from departments in Thua Thien Hue province, representatives of universities and research institutes, and Hue University alumni currently working in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and abroad. The interviews were conducted to collect in-depth information on migration motivations, assessment of opportunities to return to the locality, as well as policy expectations from the perspective of knowledge workers (Linh & Van, 2019).

The combination of the above methods creates a solid database in both breadth and depth, thereby enhancing the feasibility and reliability of the conclusions and policy recommendations made in the study.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Migration status of>NNLCLC in Hue city

According to data from the General Statistics Office (GSO, 2021), in the period 2015 - 2020, the rate of university graduates in Hue staying to work locally was only under 30%. Many key sectors such as healthcare, education, and information technology witnessed an increasingly clear phenomenon of young human resources leaving (Nguyen, 2019; Huynh, 2021). In addition, research by Linh and Van (2019) also showed that more than 70% of Hue University alumni surveyed are currently working in major centers such as Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, or abroad. This is an alarming trend if there is no timely policy. Data from the General Statistics Office (GSO, 2021) shows that in the period 2015 - 2020, the rate of university graduates in Hue staying to work locally was only under 30%. Some key industries such as information technology, health care, and education have all recorded a decline in the highly skilled workforce due to the trend of moving to larger economic centers such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, or to developed countries such as Korea, Japan, and Germany (World Bank, 2016; IOM, 2021). According to the survey results of Linh and Van (2019) with 300 former students of Hue University, up to 73% are currently working outside the province, most of which are concentrated in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Notably, nearly 20% of respondents said they do not intend to return to Hue within the next 5 years due to lack of suitable career opportunities, low income, and uncompetitive working environment. In addition, UNDP research (2022) also shows that Hue is among the localities with a high rate of brain drain, but the ability to attract this resource back is very limited. At the same time, the report of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (2023) also emphasized that while many other localities have issued preferential policies for talents, Hue still does not have a separate mechanism strong enough to compete with large cities in attracting and retaining>NNLCLC. This shows the need to build a human resource development strategy suitable to the local socio-economic characteristics. In addition, the uneven development of the local labor market is a factor contributing to accelerating the migration process. In a report on the results of a scientific research project at Hue University level by Nguyen Van Cuong (2018), it is said that in Hue, although the education system is relatively developed, there is a serious shortage of large-scale enterprises, high-tech enterprises and research and development centers, leading to the situation of "leaving after training". This situation reflects not only a serious brain drain but also a warning about the competitiveness and attractiveness of the living and working environment in Hue for the young, creative and knowledgeable workforce. Not only that, the phenomenon of teams with high academic titles and degrees such as Professors, Associate Professors, PhDs, Doctors of Hue University and Hue Central Hospital in the recent past transferring to work at universities and large hospitals in Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang still exists.

Causes and Impacts

Causes

The phenomenon of migration of high-quality human resources in Hue originates from many intertwined causes of economic, social, personal and policy mechanisms. These causes are not only local manifestations but also reflect the general trend of intellectual labor migration in Vietnam and developing countries (Dang & Tacoli, 2018).

Firstly, economic reasons are considered the main factor. The average income of university-educated workers in Hue is still 30-50% lower than in Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi (World Bank, 2014; GSO, 2021). While large cities have many FDI enterprises, technology corporations and scientific research centers, Hue still mainly relies on the administrative sector, public health and education - sectors with stable salaries but little motivation for innovation and income growth (Tran, 2021). The absence of high-tech companies or innovative industrial parks in Hue makes the labor market monotonous and less attractive to young people (Nguyen, 2019).

Second, social and institutional factors play a significant role. The social infrastructure system in Hue - including housing for experts, high-quality healthcare, international private education services, and a modern urban cultural environment - is still relatively backward compared to the expectations of high-quality workers. According to a survey by UNDP (2022), up to 68% of knowledge workers in Hue believe that the current living environment is not attractive enough to stay long-term, especially for those who have studied abroad or worked in large cities.

Third, personal factors and development aspirations are also important drivers of migration. In a knowledge-based and globalized society, young people often prioritize a dynamic working environment, international learning opportunities, modern office culture, and the ability to develop their personal careers (Bui & Le, 2020; OECD, 2018). When Hue cannot meet these factors, the choice to “leave” becomes understandable.

Fourth, the lack of policies to promote and encourage return is a strategic cause. Although some localities such as Da Nang, Binh Duong or Quang Ninh have specific policies to attract and retain talent (e.g. research support, income tax incentives, housing for experts), Hue still does not have a clear, comprehensive or competitive policy (Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2023).

Impact

The migration of high-quality human resources has negative impacts on both economic and social aspects and long-term development strategy of Hue city.

First of all, in economic terms, the loss of skilled human resources means a shortage of knowledge-based production forces - which is a decisive factor in the innovation-based growth model. According to the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI, 2022), Thua Thien Hue province is ranked low in terms of “quality of human resources” and “ability to attract high-tech investment”, partly due to the shortage of local experts.

Socially, the migration phenomenon widens the gap between Hue and major cities in terms of living standards, labor productivity and international openness. It also makes the mentality of “leaving is success” more and more ingrained in the young generation, creating a vicious cycle of training - leaving - re-deficit (Nguyen Van Cuong, 2018). This negatively impacts the motivation for innovation and the development of the local academic - technological ecosystem.

Finally, from a strategic perspective, without timely policy intervention, Hue will miss the “golden demographic opportunity”, the time when the young, highly educated population is at a high level to transform itself into a knowledge-based economy. The failure to retain and develop NNLC not only makes Hue continue to depend on administrative work but also slows down the comprehensive modernization process of this heritage city (UNDP, 2022). Therefore, clearly identifying the causes and accurately analyzing the consequences is a necessary prerequisite to building in-depth human resource development policies that are suitable to Hue’s own characteristics in the context of increasingly fierce competition for high-quality human resources in Vietnam and the region.

Policy orientation to retain and attract Qualified Human Resources

Retaining and attracting high-quality human resources (HLHR) in Hue needs to be placed in a comprehensive development strategy, synchronously between the pillars: infrastructure, institutions, labor market, education - training, and culture of innovation. Below are proposed policy orientations based on theory, practical surveys and reference to experiences of other localities in the country and internationally.

Improving living and Working Infrastructure

One of the major barriers that makes high-quality workers leave Hue is that social infrastructure does not meet the needs of long-term living. The government needs to invest in upgrading the hospital system, international schools, modern living spaces and smart urban areas. Da Nang's experience shows that synchronous planning of high-tech urban areas associated with housing for experts has contributed significantly to retaining intellectuals (Nguyen Quoc Dung, 2019). In addition, the city needs to develop creative workspaces (coworking spaces, startup labs), establish centers to support technology and innovation businesses, thereby creating work motivation for the young generation of workers (OECD, 2018).

Strengthening policies to attract and Reward Talent

Hue City needs to develop specific preferential policies for NNLCLC such as: initial financial support when returning to work, income tax exemption/reduction for the first 3-5 years, preferential land allocation to build houses or open science and technology enterprises. These policies need to be institutionalized by resolutions of provincial people's councils to ensure sustainability and consistency in implementation (Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2023). At the same time, the model of "ordering talent" early - that is, linking the government and universities in selecting, training and retaining excellent students should also be tested. This is a model that has been successfully applied by many East Asian countries (World Bank, 2014).

Support career development and innovation ecosystem

One of the factors that causes high-quality workers to leave Hue is the lack of promotion opportunities and a creative working environment. Therefore, the government should support businesses to establish R&D centers, connect scientists with local businesses, and promote innovative start-up activities in areas of strength such as medical technology, cultural technology, and heritage conservation (Huynh Thi Thu Hien, 2021). In addition, building a mentor-mentee network between Hue-born experts working in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, or abroad with local students and young researchers will be an effective way to maintain connections, share knowledge, and enhance community spirit (Linh & Van, 2019).

Communication innovation and Cultural Development Orientation

Retaining NNLCLC is not only a matter of facilities or treatment but also a cultural issue. Hue needs to build the image of a knowledge-based, dynamic, and friendly city for young workers. Public and transparent communication campaigns about local human resource development strategies and successful examples returning from Hue should be widely disseminated in society (UNDP, 2022).

In particular, it is necessary to integrate local education and innovative entrepreneurship into the training programs at local universities. This will help build trust and commitment to local development from the student generation - the groups at highest risk of migration (Pham Thi Hong, 2019). Thus, policies to retain and attract NNLCLC need to shift from the perspective of "single incentives" to "creating an attractive ecosystem". Interventions need to be simultaneous in terms of institutions, living environment, development opportunities and value orientation, in which people must be at the center of all development decisions.

CONCLUSION

The migration of high-quality human resources in Hue city is a worrying phenomenon, requiring the synchronous participation of the government, community and intellectuals. The article has pointed out the root causes of this problem from the economic, social and individual perspectives; at the same time, proposed systematic and sustainable solutions. Retaining and attracting talents should be considered the focus of the strategy to develop Hue into a leading cultural - educational - scientific and technological center of the Central region. Migration of high-quality human resources is posing serious challenges to the sustainable development of Hue city. In the context of increasingly fierce competition for intellectual labor not only domestically but also globally, the delay in planning policies to retain and attract high-quality human resources may cause Hue to lose its advantage in human resources - a fundamental factor for developing a knowledge-based economy and building a creative urban area. Through research, the article has clarified the current migration situation, pointing out the basic causes including: income and career opportunity gap, quality of social infrastructure, lack of appropriate incentive policies, and development environment not attractive enough for highly skilled workers. The negative impacts do not stop at the shortage of human resources but also entail long-term consequences on competitiveness, opportunities to attract quality investment and innovation of the entire region. On that basis, the article proposes a group of comprehensive, synchronous and highly implementable solutions. Policies need to shift from the mindset of

"individual incentives" to "building a knowledge ecosystem", including: investing in modern living and working infrastructure, long-term incentive policies, supporting innovative startups, developing the R&D ecosystem, and enhancing the cultural identity of Hue's knowledge city.

Through research, it is shown that all human resource policies need to put people at the center - not only as beneficiaries but also as creators. Success in retaining and attracting NNLCLC will be the decisive driving force for Hue to realize its goal of becoming an education - health - culture - technology center of the Central region and the whole country. In the coming time, extensive research can focus on quantitatively evaluating the effectiveness of current human resource policies in Hue, comparing them with provinces and cities with successful policies, thereby improving the feasibility of the solutions proposed in this article.

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