Vocational education needs bold reform

West Java Governor Ridwan Kamil was unable to hide his disappointment over the province’s high unemployment rate. In fact, the latest figures from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) showed that open unemployment in the province had declined from 8.16 percent in 2018 to 7.73 percent in 2019, primarily due to the affirmative measures of the West Java education office; yet it was still the highest among other provinces.

More disappointingly, many of the unemployed are graduates of vocational schools, which are supposed to produce highly skilled workers. What went wrong?

In the last several years, the country has seen an uncontrolled explosion of private vocational schools, for which the provincial administration had failed to carry out a proper feasibility study regarding demand and better quality schools that met at least the minimum educational standards.

To date, the country has 10,576 private vocational schools and 3,581 public vocational schools, but fewer students attend private vocational schools. One private vocational school even had only 50 enrolled students. The figures point to how the private sector indiscriminately built numerous vocational schools only to lure students, taking both the students’ money and the government subsidy, but failed to deliver high quality teaching and produce a large number of skilled graduates to be absorbed by industries.

In response, the central government has launched a revitalization program to fix the acute problems in vocational education by, among other measures, mapping the needs of industries, facilitating productive rapport between vocational schools and relevant industries, providing additional training to teachers and empowering selected vocational schools. It is also overhauling education facilities like laboratories, primarily at vocational schools that provide engineering, tourism, maritime, creative industry and agribusiness programs.

In addition, the government has been improving its teaching factory program along three lines. First, the program is offered on campus as part of the academic system. Second, the program is offered as an off-campus program for students and is not part of the academic system. Third, the program can be offered as a special program, either on- or off-campus.

As a result, 655 schools have been readjusted to align with the needs of related industries, 3,830 teachers have been trained to develop competence exams and 2,880 teachers have been trained as competence certification assessors. Finally, 1,000 students have enrolled in vocational competence certification programs.

Selected vocational schools have also established different forms of collaboration with relevant companies, such as L’Oreal, Yamaha, Huwae, MedecoEnergy, Kubota, Daihatsu, Casio and Adira Finance.

But this is still not enough. With over 5 million students enrolled at 14,167 private and public vocational high schools amid the rapidly changing industrial landscape, it is almost impossible to implement sweeping and significant reform without across-the-board, consistent measures.

Several bold steps must be taken to ensure the continued productivity of vocational schools.

First, decisive action is needed to deal with underperforming vocational schools. Such schools should be merged or closed, particularly profit-oriented private schools that are lagging behind other vocational schools.

It is understandable that governor Ridwan wants a thorough evaluation of vocational schools in his province, and fewer schools would mean less difficulty in gearing them toward reform.

Second, reciprocal partnerships with industries should incorporate far-reaching curricular development, well planned job recruitment and regular consultative meetings every semester at the very least. The course of study, curriculum and practice facilities should be designed and equipped to align with industry demand.

Third, tighten interministerial synergy between the Education and Culture Ministry and the manpower, industry, higher education and research ministries to address substantive matters in tackling the problems and enhancing the opportunities of vocational education. For example, teacher training colleges should have well-structured programs that produce good teachers. Furthermore, a tax incentive could be offered to attract more corporate involvement in the revitalization program.

And all parties should work hand-in-hand and harder toward streamlined job absorption. Ideally, at least 60 percent of vocational school students should be absorbed immediately upon graduation, and close to 100 percent three to six months after they graduate.

Fourth, collaboration with foreign parties should focus not only on traditional Western vocational education in Germany or Switzerland, and should also look East. Vocational education that uses cutting-edge technology has been progressing impressively in money-surplus China and South Korea.

Fifth, more efficient and personalized learning should be delivered effectively through the use of advanced technology to address the large number of students and the shortage of competent teachers and instructors. For example, augmented reality and virtual reality — which are becoming more affordable and accessible — can be used to introduce practicums before students advance to handle on work. This will help meet demands that courses should combine 60 percent practice and 40 percent theory.

Lastly, vocational schools should not only focus on regular competencies in the current market that might soon become outdated, but also stay abreast of emerging and still nascent skills that have the potential for broad adoption in the future, such as social media marketing, human-centered design, workflow automation and front-end web development. These emerging skills can be viewed as a signpost for how industries are transforming, and vocational education needs to be sensitive to such changes to anticipate and adjust quickly to industry developments so they can produce competent and highly skilled graduates.

The writer is the director of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Open Learning Center and a lecturer at the Teacher Training and Education Sciences Faculty of Sultan Agung Yogyakarta University in Serang, Banten. The views expressed are his own.

For HK, one-country is the bottom line

Li Peiwen
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The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which ended on Sunday, marks the beginning of a new era for China’s national development. The report has put forward the concept of China’s national rejuvenation and the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. The report also highlighted the importance of the “one country, two systems” principle and its successful implementation in Hong Kong and Macao.

Under the guidance of this strategy, the central government is expected to more steadily implement the “one country, two systems” principle in all fields. Hong Kong and Macao are expected to maintain their autonomy, while fully adhering to the principles of the country. The strategy aims to ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of Hong Kong and Macao.

The implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle is crucial for maintaining national unity and safeguarding China’s sovereignty. It provides a unique model for the peaceful reunification of Chinese compatriots in all regions, and serves as a blueprint for other areas with historical ties to China.

With the successful implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle, Hong Kong and Macao have maintained their autonomy and enjoy a high degree of self-governance. They have also developed their economies and improved their living standards, which has contributed significantly to the prosperity and stability of the nation.

The implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle is a significant achievement of the Chinese nation, and it has been widely recognized and supported by the international community. The strategy has proved to be successful in maintaining peace and prosperity in Hong Kong and Macao, and it has set an example for other areas with similar historical ties to China.

The implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle is a vital contribution to the national rejuvenation of China. It has demonstrated the effectiveness of the “one country, two systems” principle in promoting national unity and safeguarding China’s sovereignty. It has also shown that the country can achieve peace and prosperity through peaceful reunification and autonomy.

The implementation of the “one country, two systems” principle is an important part of China’s national rejuvenation strategy. It has played a crucial role in maintaining national unity and safeguarding China’s sovereignty. It has also contributed to the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong and Macao, and it has set an example for other areas with similar historical ties to China.