Change VTE image to resolve vocational, technical skills shortage

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The greatest gap in most developing and growing economies is the shortage of vocational and technical skills, and the greatest underlying challenge to improve the situation of vocational technical education (VTE) was changing its image, a Singaporean educator said yesterday.

Many countries perceive VTE as a weak link in the education system. Seen as less prestigious compared to university or polytechnic education, VTE is fighting a perception challenge.

Speaking at a policy forum on vocational education during the third plenary session of the 46th Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Council Conference (Seamec) and the sixth ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (Ased), Dr Law Song Seng, the former CEO of Singapore's Institute of Technical Education (ITE), said that the institute has had to change the image of vocational technical education.

The process, he said, took 15 years.

From the former system of "vocational institutes", ITE turned into modern "regional colleges". The key breakthrough was turning around the public perception and image of ITE, Dr Law said.

He also said that ITE adapted a "Hands-on, Minds-on and Hearts-on" education and has produced and nurtured well-rounded graduates ready for society and the global economy.

Brunei's Minister of Education, Pehin Orang Kaya Seri Kema Dato Seri Setia Dr Hj Abu Bakar Hj Apong, chaired the forum.

At the end of the forum, participants were invited to a question and answer session with Dr Law.

After the plenary session a Ministerial Round Table Meeting was conducted to provide opportunities for the Seameo Education Ministers to discuss and share their experiences on specific issues and common interests in education.

One of the delegates, Professor Dr Muhd Nuh from Indonesia commented that discussions during the meeting went well and that the meeting was fruitful.

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