

# Rural labor structure transformation under the impact of labor migration: Evidence from Central Vietnam

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## Abstract

Rural labor migration has been making a profound impact on all aspects of life of a farmer in Thanh Hoa province. The process of labor migration, however, has also brought a large number of challenges to provinces in Central Vietnam; for example, career, employment, cultural changes, lifestyle, human resources, changes in labor structure of agriculture, etc. This study was conducted to indicate the effects of labor migration on the rural labor restructuring process at present. Data were obtained from 385 respondents through 15 in-depth interviews, 10 semi-structured interviews and 2

group discussions. The study has systematically assessed the transition status of rural labor structure under the influence of labor migration. It is very useful for the local authorities and agencies to identify the general situation of changes in the structure of agriculture, industry, and the service sector in households. Besides, the study has suggested several solutions to affect the rural labor transformation process positively.

**Keywords:** *Migration, labor migration, labor structure, change, rural areas.*

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## 1. Introduction

Labor migration is an inevitable and historical process that has happened not only in Vietnam, but also in many other countries over the world (Dang et al., 1997). The establishment, existence, and development of a nation are often associated with migration and labor migration. At present, under the impact of globalization, labor migration has grown in form and scale, with a large number of different features in comparison with those in the past (Ruhs; 2013). Labor migration has crossed the boundaries of the country and attracted the attention of other nations around the world, including the ASEAN community. The 2007 ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers and the establishment of the ASEAN Community in 2015 is a testimony to the fact mentioned above. Under the general principles, the protection of the rights of the migrant workers is a shared obligation of both receiving and sending countries. Moreover, these countries must support the migrant workers to live and work legally, to be equally treated and provided useful resources of information, social security services in the receiving countries as well as the community reintegration in the sending countries. Thanks to the Declaration, ASEAN has also strengthened the connection of member countries to create a strong and united community, which brings a solid foundation for labor migration in particular, and people in general, to have a stable and peaceful life.

In Vietnam, migration and labor migration were often associated with the expansion of the nation's borders or the mode of human resourcefulness in the face of difficulties and obstacles, or the response to natural disasters, foreign invasion, and civil war. People want to move, find a place with better living conditions and security. Nevertheless, migration and labor migration at that time were largely confined to the scale of a nation, with the movement from one area to another, from one locality to another (Huy & Nonneman; 2016). If the Revolution in 1986 was considered as a milestone marking the rise of migration and labor migration, it can be seen at this moment that the

Government has made specific plans to mobilize and support labor and people to move to Tay Nguyen, South East with the aim of distributing the population and create new life for migrants. In the period of revolution, migrants from rural areas were attracted to industrial zones and big cities with the hope of seeking jobs, and increasing incomes thanks to the development of these industrial zones and informal economic sectors (Dang, 2012).

Disparities in territorial development are considered as the main antecedent of migration flows (Szymanska-Matusiewicz, 2016; Lorente, 2017). In addition, unequal investments in key areas have resulted in the disparities in labor supply and demand as well as motivations for migration (Dang, 2009). On the other hand, the Revolution has brought great prosperity to the economic - cultural - social aspects. The process of industrialization and modernization has led to a dramatic transformation, which has changed rural areas in Vietnam. There are, however, a large number of residents, especially in remote and isolated areas, facing a lot of difficulties. The development of the economy in recent years has not only promoted the development of the countryside but also created a lot of challenges.

In the context of the security of land in rural areas, particularly the lack of cultivated land, labor surplus and lack of employment are emerging as serious problems. The unemployment and purchase of agricultural land have become a social issue, which creates and motivates rural-to-urban migration flow (Liu, Wang, Cheng, Zheng, & Lu, 2016). Along with the ongoing industrialization and urbanization in Vietnam, urban areas have continued to be expanded. The transformation of the economic structure together with the process of industrialization - modernization as well as population pressure, employment, land, occupation has increased the migration in the countryside, especially the migration to big cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam (Dang, 2009). This fact raises urgent needs for answers about migration, which draws the attention of the society, especially

social sciences. Rural labor migration is a positive factor in job creation, income generation, living condition improvements, creating a premise for household economic developments and contributing to the poverty-alleviation movement in the countryside (Sutherland, 2013; Rapoport, 2016).

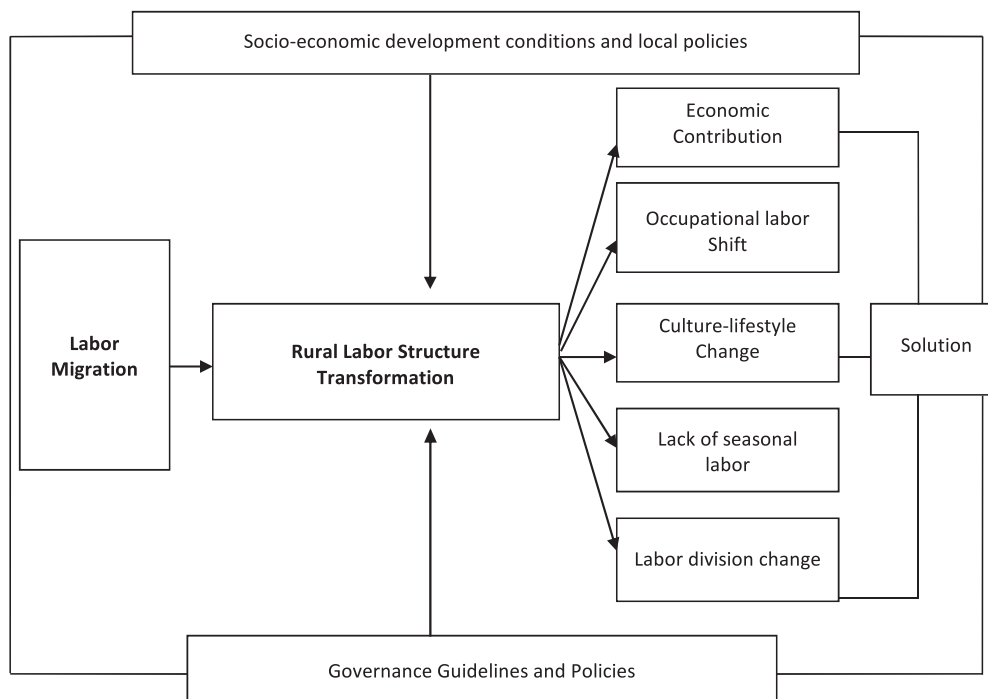
Besides economic benefits, rural labor migration also brings new knowledge and new experiences including the capacity for thinking, dynamism, the awareness of enrichment, and value-added factors which promotes the economic development in households in general and the social-economic development in particular (Rafique Wassan et al., 2017). However, in addition to the benefits brought from labor migration, there are still a large number of long-term negative impacts on the family and society. These influences are the negative effects on labor structure in agriculture, which leads to a large number of current problems in rural areas (Dinkelman & Mariotti, 2016). Moreover, the labor migration results in the disorder of family management, the involvement in production, household, child care, elderly care; severed family relationships, which affects people's stable life and

family happiness (Chua & Wellman, 2015).

At present, in Trieu Son district - Thanh Hoa province, labor migration has positively and deeply affected all aspects of rural life. Nevertheless, labor migration has brought a large number of challenges for the authority and residents such as problems related to employment, changes in culture, lifestyle, and labor structure in agriculture, and so on (Doan, 2014; 2016). The influences of labor migration should be considered in both positive and negative aspects because its effects are not only on the scale of a family or a local community but also on the whole society.

Based on the discussions above, previous studies were ignored, and more material was acquired from the survey as well as personal perceptions and perspectives. Moreover, this study also analyzed and assessed both positive and negative effects of labor migration on rural labor structure to propose feasible recommendations to overcome shortcomings as well as promote advantages of rural development in Trieu Son district, Thanh Hoa province.

## 2. Methodology



Through the analysis of a series of documents, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, focus group discussions, sampling procedure selection was stratified by cluster in several steps. For the study area, based on the ecological area and the economic development of the regions, two clusters of communes were selected: Central and Southern clusters. Then, based on the rate of local labor migration, for each cluster, we chose two representative communes which have the most typical labor migration. According to the surveyed households, the respondents were selected based on the list of households and categorized into three groups: poor, medium, high quintiles. Meanwhile, the studied households were representative of the households in the selected region and communities. There were 385 people in households with and without labor migration.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### Economic Contribution to the Family

Most of the causes of labor migration are related to economic issues; therefore, the problems affecting income and salary are important factors, which make the workers decide to migrate (Kaul, Singh, Garg, Singh, Singh; 2011). Based on labor migration,

migrants' family life has been improved, which results in the development of the region. Migration derives from the household; as a result, its direct effects are also on the household (Dang, 2006). Through the process of labor migration, rural people interact with urban society and gain both physical resources and knowledge from urban areas. The accumulated resources are transferred to the localities, to the households through the contribution of migrants to the development of the household economy (Hoang & Yeoh; 2015).

Moreover, the process of labor migration does not only reflect the aspirations or needs of the migrants themselves, but also shows those of the entire household to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks. Through labor migration, the members of the household can save and contribute to the household's overall income. Labor migration, therefore, significantly affects people's economic life.

Table 1 shows the purposes of labor migration in households. The empirical study results show that 96.9% was to get out of poverty, 91.2% was for house construction and repair, 82.9% for medical treatment for relatives, 78.4% for child-raising, and 56.9% for the reason of having no capital for start-up.

**Table 1: The purposes of labor migration in the households**

| Reasons                           | Perception (%) |      |               |      | N<br>(People) | (%)          |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|--------------|
|                                   | Agree          |      | Disagree      |      |               |              |
|                                   | N<br>(People)  | (%)  | N<br>(People) | (%)  |               |              |
| Poverty-alleviation               | 373            | 96.9 | 12            | 3.1  | <b>385</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |
| House construction and repair     | 351            | 91.2 | 34            | 8.8  | <b>385</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |
| Medical treatment for relatives   | 319            | 82.9 | 66            | 17.1 | <b>385</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |
| Shopping for household appliances | 318            | 82.6 | 67            | 17.4 | <b>385</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |
| Difficulty in finding jobs        | 311            | 80.8 | 74            | 19.2 | <b>385</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |
| Child-raising                     | 302            | 78.4 | 83            | 21.6 | <b>385</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |
| No capital for start-up           | 219            | 56.9 | 166           | 43.1 | <b>385</b>    | <b>100.0</b> |

Thus, the majority of migrants in the households always set goals for their decision and expect to achieve these goals before leaving their hometown to a new land (Le, 2011; Perales, 2017). However, in order to see the effects of labor migration on household economic development, it is necessary to consider the perceptions of migrants on living standards and income brought from labor migration.

Table 2 shows that 91.4% of respondents agree that labor migration affects the household's income and economic life. However, there is still a minority of households (13.5%) that claim that labor migration does not influence these aspects. These impacts come from a loss of business or loss of property in doing business overseas; as a result, there is no money or income to send back to the homeland. There are some cases in which migrants are in debt or unable to repay; as a consequence, their relatives have to send money to bring them back (Table 2).

**Table 2: Assessment of the impact of labor migration on household economy**

| Perception   | Households in Hop Ly Commune |              | Households in Hop Thang Commune |              | On average |
|--------------|------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------------|--------------|------------|
|              | N (People)                   | (%)          | N (People)                      | (%)          |            |
| Affected     | 185                          | 92.5         | 167                             | 90.3         | 91.4       |
| Not affected | 15                           | 7.5          | 18                              | 9.7          | 13.5       |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>200</b>                   | <b>100.0</b> | <b>185</b>                      | <b>100.0</b> | -          |

Previously, when the households had no migrants, there was a lack of facilities in the family; however, after money earned from migrants was sent back, many items such as refrigerator, TV set, water heater, car/truck, computers, etc. were added to the household. Previously, in Hop Ly Commune, the number of households owning a TV set was 78 households, accounting for 39% of households in the sample set. However, currently, TV sets are found in all the two hundred investigated households (reaching

100%). Similarly, the number of other devices tends to increase. Particularly, the number of cars/trucks of the households in the two communes have risen with the number of cars/trucks in Hop Ly Commune increasing from 1 to 17 households and those in Hop Thang Commune rising from 0 to 3 households. These numbers are a testimony to the fact that the living standard of the migrant households has significantly improved.

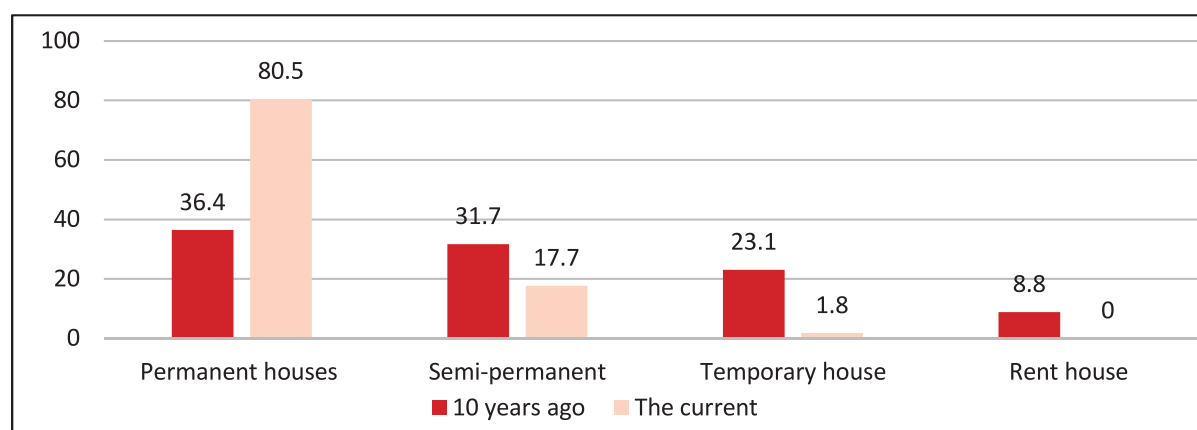


Figure 1: The current type of housing and the type of housing 10 years ago (%)

Similar results are seen when analyzing the housing conditions of the households before and after labor migration. The majority of surveyed households agree that thanks to labor migration, the family's life has dramatically improved with the house being repaired and reconstructed. The number of temporary, semi-permanent, or rented houses in the households having migrants has significantly decreased and been

replaced by permanent houses with beautiful and solid construction. In particular, the number of households with permanent houses accounted for only 36.4% 10 years ago. However, the figure is 80.5% currently with the number of semi-permanent houses reducing from 31.7% to 17.7%, that of temporary houses decreasing from 23.1% to 1.8%, and that of rented houses falling from 8.8% to nil.

**Table 3: The rate of deposits in the total income of different types of households**

| Perception<br>Types of households | Any rate   |              | At least 50% |              | 100%       |              |
|-----------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|                                   | N (People) | (%)          | N (People)   | (%)          | N (People) | (%)          |
| Poor                              | 112        | 29.1         | 198          | 51.4         | 318        | 82.6         |
| Medium                            | 98         | 25.5         | 75           | 19.5         | 62         | 16.1         |
| Over-medium                       | 89         | 23.1         | 60           | 15.6         | 5          | 1.3          |
| Rich                              | 86         | 22.3         | 52           | 13.5         | 0          | 0            |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>385</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>385</b>   | <b>100.0</b> | <b>385</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Table 3 shows that the rate of deposits in the total income of the poor households is always the highest in comparison with the others, accounting for 82.6% of the absolute contribution. Thus, the contribution of labor migration to the family's economic development in the poor and medium group is extremely important, which provides daily living expenses, improves living standards, and enhances incomes.

*“Most of the households listed in the poor and medium group in the surveyed areas migrate to places with better economic conditions, and higher income. When the economic conditions of these households are low, the most effective option for them is to move to a better place for living and working to earn money and improve their family's life.”* (Focus Group Discussion Group 1).

Before labor migration, the number of households earning less than 1 million and from 1 to 3 million VND in both communes accounts for nearly 70%; however, thanks to labor migration, there are no households

with the income being under 1 million and the number of households with income in the range of 1 to 3 million reduces to the average level at 21.4%. Instead, the number of households earning from 3 to 5 million VND and from 5 to 10 million VND significantly increases. Particularly, in Hop Ly Commune, the figure has risen from 19 households (accounting for 9.5%) to 59 households (29.5%) in the group with the income being from 5 to 10 million, thanks to labor migration, while the figure in Hop Thang Commune has increased from 11 households (5.9%) to 50 households (27%) in the same group (Table 4).

*“The number of high-income households has increased; therefore, the number of poor and poverty-threshold households has dramatically reduced. The number of households earning from 3 to 5 million has also increased. There are even several households with income being higher than 5 million/person/month. With the amount of income in the countryside, these households are considered to have a rather high income. In general, households earning more than 5*

million are mostly households doing business or having children or relatives migrating abroad.” (Focus Group Discussion Group 1).

In terms of perception of income of the households with and without migrants, it is shown that 90.4% of the households with migrants claim their income has improved while 2.3% of the households with migrants believe that their income has decreased. Besides, 7.3% of households are undecided about the change in income from migration. Therefore, in general, labor migration is considered as an economic strategy to increase income for the households in the region. Labor migration not only helps the households solve economic difficulties, but also brings opportunities for family members to develop in all aspects. Moreover, labor migration also promotes local socio-economic development.

“Because of difficult economic conditions in our hometown, we are forced to seek jobs in another place to improve our family life, to raise our children, and to increase our income. It is said that “Nothing ventured, nothing gained,” which means that it is not easy to be rich without doing business. Therefore, if our income only comes from rice fields as before, it is difficult to get out of poverty, much less to be rich or bring our children a good education. We believe that in comparison with the family without migrants, 90% of the households with migrants have a better life. There is just a minority of the households with migrants having difficult life because the migrants are cheated, lose money, gamble, or spend all the money they earned.” (Focus group discussion Group 2).

**Table 4: The comparison of households' income before and after labor migration**

| Commune         | The households in Hop Ly Commune |              |                       |              | The households in Hop Thang Commune |              |                       |              |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|
|                 | Before labor migration           |              | After labor migration |              | Before labor migration              |              | After labor migration |              |
|                 | N (People)                       | (%)          | N (People)            | (%)          | N (People)                          | (%)          | N (People)            | (%)          |
| Under 1 million | 13                               | 6.5          | 0                     | 0.0          | 34                                  | 18.4         | 0                     | 0.0          |
| 1 - 3 million   | 127                              | 63.5         | 52                    | 26.0         | 94                                  | 50.8         | 31                    | 16.8         |
| 3 - 5 million   | 41                               | 20.5         | 89                    | 44.5         | 46                                  | 24.9         | 104                   | 56.2         |
| 5 - 10 million  | 11                               | 5.5          | 44                    | 22.0         | 6                                   | 3.2          | 37                    | 20.0         |
| Over 10 million | 8                                | 4.0          | 15                    | 7.5          | 5                                   | 2.7          | 13                    | 7.0          |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>200</b>                       | <b>100.0</b> | <b>200</b>            | <b>100.0</b> | <b>185</b>                          | <b>100.0</b> | <b>185</b>            | <b>100.0</b> |

#### The contribution of labor migration to local labor restructuring

The occupational status of migrants before labor migration partly reflects the economic development of the areas having migrants because the occupation of migrants in each area indicates the ability to meet the employment needs of the labor in the area. The change in the labor occupation and labor restructuring of the region with migrants will show the effects of labor migration on the leaving country in terms of labor structure and occupational structure (Lan, 2011).

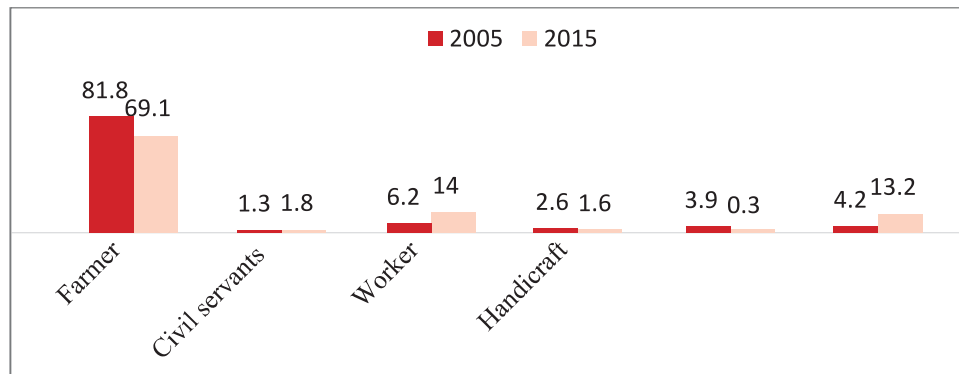


Figure 2: Occupation of migrants in 2005 and 2015 (%)

Research reveals that most of the labor force in the two surveyed communes are mainly farmers. However, after labor migration, the migrants have changed their occupation, from agricultural to non-agricultural sectors. This fact is considered an indispensable trend of social-economic development and one of the measures to accelerate the process of industrialization, modernization, which contributes to improve living standards and raise the households' income. The occupational labor structure of the households in the period 2005-2015 indicates that there are 6 main types of occupation and 3 categories (agricultural households, mixed households, and non-agricultural households) in which the households in the two communes can be divided.

Figure 2 shows that the proportion of farmers is extremely high while that of civil servants, handicraft workers, service providers, and businessmen is modest; specifically, the percentages are: farmers (81.8%), workers (6.2%), service providers and businessmen (4.2%), freelancers (3.9%), handicraft workers (2.6%), and civil servants (1.3%). After labor migration (in 2015), however, significant changes in the occupations of migrants have been seen. The migrants have moved from the agricultural sector to the non-agricultural sector. Particularly, the number of households in the agricultural sector has reduced from 81.8% to 69.1% (decreased by 12.7%) while that in service and business sector has increased from 4.2% to 13.2% (increased by 9%). Besides, the proportion of workers has risen from 6.2% to 14% (increased by 7.8%); and the proportion of other occupations has

slightly increased. Meanwhile, the group of freelancers witnessed a decrease from 3.9% to 0.3% (decreased by 3.6%) because this group found jobs and worked in industrial zones and factories.

It is worth mentioning that the process of labor migration after 2009 (Labor Export Scheme approved by the Prime Minister) has significantly affected the labor migration in the regions. On the other hand, the process of industrialization and modernization has created a large disparity in labor productivity in agriculture. Besides, higher income in urban areas has been the reason for the flow of labor migration from the countryside to big cities to find jobs and increase income. After a period of working post-migration, the money earned by migrants is spent on different purposes, including investment in business and opening a store. Many households no longer work in agriculture and move to the non-agricultural sector, which brings higher economic efficiency. This is one of the main reasons leading to the process of labor restructuring in areas under research.

*“Most of the households having migrants in the area have good economic conditions. From 2012, there are dramatic changes in our life. The number of households with favorable conditions and doing business in the area is mainly households with migrants working overseas for a long time. Many migrants are the head of the family. After working abroad for a long time, they returned home with their savings. Then they invested in new ventures, brought higher income for the family, and contributed to the*



*diversification of consumer products in the area.*" (Semi-structured interview, Male, 46 years old, Commune officials).

Different occupations will bring a variety of living and occupational experiences for migrants. When returning home, the migrants will apply these experiences in the region, which significantly affects local socio-economic development. Thus, in order to meet the occupational requirements after migration, the migrants must not only try to adapt to a new life but also self-study and self-train to improve their skills and abilities. These efforts help to maintain stable jobs for the migrants at places where they have migrated to. Moreover, these migrants will be an extremely important labor force when the regions invest in constructing factories (Le, 2011).

*"In the past, when we started working in the factory, we felt confused because the production line was fast, so if we could not catch up with speed, the products would be piled and we could not reach the target volume of goods in a month. It took me two months to get familiar with this production line, and now it is easy for me to handle even with my eyes closed."* (In-depth interview, Female, 42 years old, Migrant).

*"Agility is important for every job. Previously, when I started assembling electronic devices for the Japanese company, I felt stressed because I hadn't got familiar with the job. However, everything was alright when I tried to pay full attention to the job, studied hard, and worked it out."* (In-depth interview, 38 years old, Migrant).

Labor migration not only helps people find jobs to support themselves and their families but also provides them a stable and long-term career so that they have the opportunities to make plans for their future. Moreover, thanks to the process of labor migration, migrants gain more experiences, understand market demands, as well as get access to science and technology together with accumulated capital. Therefore, when returning to their homeland,

migrants can be confident to open small production facilities, shops, small service businesses, which meets the needs of local people. In general, labor migration contributes to shift pure labor to other sectors and diversify livelihood strategies.

*"Most of the migrants in the households work in industrial zones, factories both inside and outside the country. Most of them are young; therefore, they quickly absorb cutting-edge science and technology. Moreover, to work in foreign factories or companies, the labor force must have an industrial style, and improved skills; as a result, after returning to their homeland, it is easier for them to adapt in the new working environment."* (Focus Group Discussion - Group1)

The occupational mobility of migrants in the households in the area under research will have a two-fold impact on the family and the locality. On the one hand, labor migration will bring fear of farming, the desire to escape from rural areas and farming, especially to the youth. On the other hand, labor migration changes the occupational perception of rural families. The families with migrants are likely to prefer non-agricultural jobs as a choice of occupations for their children, which creates flexibility in career choices to adapt to market conditions (Le, 2011). Currently, for many households, labor migration is used as a means to achieve higher education and better educational conditions for family members, especially their children, which positively affects the migrants and their family members (Chen, Huang, Rozelle, Shi, & Zhang, 2014).

It is shown in Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews that the majority of migrant households invest their money, time, and effort in their children's education with the desire that in the future, their children will have stable jobs and better lives. They believe that "the investment in education is the investment in development." Most of the households in the surveyed communes consider education as the shortest way to escape poverty with dream jobs being public servants (Table 5).

**Table 5: Parents' intentions about children's career**

| Expected Children's Career | Perception (%) |      |            |      | N (People) | (%)   |
|----------------------------|----------------|------|------------|------|------------|-------|
|                            | Agree          |      | Disagree   |      |            |       |
|                            | N (People)     | (%)  | N (People) | (%)  |            |       |
| Farmer                     | 5              | 12.5 | 35         | 87.5 | 40         | 100.0 |
| Public official            | 25             | 62.5 | 15         | 37.5 | 40         | 100.0 |
| Businessman                | 7              | 17.5 | 33         | 82.5 | 40         | 100.0 |
| Worker                     | 3              | 7.5  | 37         | 92.5 | 40         | 100.0 |
| Others                     | -              | -    | -          | -    | 40         | 100.0 |

(Total sample size N = 40 was collected and based on 10 in-depth interviews and 30 focus group discussions of migrants and migrants' relatives in Hop Ly Commune and Hop Thang Commune).

Table 5 reveals that only 12.5% of the households hope that their children will be farmers. This figure reflects the change in the parents' perceptions of their children's careers and the current trend of industrialization and modernization in the countryside. However, it is worth noting that there is only 7.5% of migrant households who would like their children to be workers in the future. This is due to the differences in living standards among the households working as public servants and the households working as farmers. As a result, 62.5% of the households in the two communes want their children to become public officials. The results of the study again confirm that labor migration contributes to the shift of occupational labor in the region.

*“Many generations in the family have always been farmers with low living standards; therefore, I think that I must try hard to bring good education to our children to apply for jobs in state agencies so that their lives will be less difficult.”* (In-depth interview, Female, 45 years old, Migrant).

Labor migration is the shift of labor from one place to another. On the scale of a nation, labor migration brings a redistribution of labor. The fact that a part of agricultural labor in the area of research moves to non-agricultural sectors (service, trade and business, industry, etc.) in big cities, has changed labor force by regions and by occupations (the number of farmers in

the area of research significantly decreased even when they migrated and returned to their homeland, since they no longer worked in the agricultural sector). The researchers concluded that “The occupational transformation of migrants is an important factor contributing to the changes in economic structure among different regions.” When a part of migrants moves to another place to work, their families and communities must rearrange the labor structure under the household's production conditions and local requirements for development (Le, 2011).

### **Contributions of labor migration to culture and lifestyles**

Labor migration affects the culture and lifestyles of both migrants and people at home, the culture of the region in particular, and the entire society in general. The changes in living and working environments, as well as living conditions, have influenced the lifestyles and other conditions of the migrants when they come back to their homeland (Curan & Saguy, 2001). On returning to their homeland, the migrants do not want to be farmers anymore; instead, they want to have a more leisurely job. They believe that thanks to labor migration, they can earn more money, and the family's financial condition is much better. A large number of migrants use their savings to invest in businesses and have a stable life, which is one of the positive things that labor migration has brought in terms of perception and thinking of the migrants. The migrants

return to their homeland bringing with them the lifestyles of the big cities that they have adopted; this helps the local culture become diverse and unique.

The study of the two communes shows that most of the migrants send money to their family for construction or investment in household production. Their reasons for migration not only include improving their family's finances, they also want to gain more work experience and improve their skills to further improve their income. In the survey sample, there are some cases in which the families are not in a difficult situation, but they still want to migrate to expand their knowledge and contribute to the family and the community after returning to their homeland.

*“Currently, a large number of households become rich after the labor export. A few years ago, some people in the commune who went to foreign countries to work as industrial textile workers, after returning to the homeland, set up garment shops by pooling their capital as partners in the business. These shops are now very crowded with many young tailors being apprentices. These shops also teach sewing and using fast techniques, which are suitable for current fashion trends. These households are typical ones that we need to study and learn from their experiences.”* (Focus Group Discussion - Group 2).

Labor migration not only contributes to the transmission of new cultural knowledge but also raises the awareness of the households in educating children. The number of households currently investing in education for the family members has increased with the perceptions and values of education being given more attention. They hope that education will help them get out of poverty, expand knowledge, work in non-agricultural sectors, and give their children opportunities to live a better life.

*“Currently, besides economic reasons, many households consider labor migration as a policy to help their children have the opportunity to expand knowledge and have a better learning environment.”*

*They believe that good education is the only way to get out of poverty; therefore, by all means, the families always try to earn money to provide their children the best learning conditions.”* (Semi-structured interview, Male, 45 years, commune officials).

On the positive side, labor migration has made significant changes in attitudes, behaviors, habits, lifestyles, and perceptions. These changes are inevitable to adjust to a new environment. When coming back to the homeland with new experiences and perceptions of life and society, the migrants contribute to change the lifestyles, habits of local people through interaction and exchange among the migrants and other family members and the society (Le, 2011).

*“My first son has been working abroad for a few years. Last year, when he was on leave for nearly a month and returned home, I realized that he had changed a lot since the first day he left the country. He is better behaved compared with the time he was still at home.”* (In-depth interview, Female, 52 years old, Migrant's relative).

### **Seasonal labor shortage due to labor migration**

The questionnaire, in-depth interviews and group discussions reveal that there are some difficulties for the households with migrants such as labor shortage in agriculture production and main tasks in the households, which dramatically affect the productivity and the quality of agricultural products in the region. The main reason for this shortage is that a majority of the labor force moves to another place to work for a long time (Widyastuti, 2018). Based on actual surveys in the two communes, the majority of the labor force migrates for a long time and only returns home during the Tet holiday. Specifically, 86.1% of the total respondents (385 questionnaires) say that the time of migration is over 2 years; 13.5% of the respondents agree that it is from 1 to 2 years. Only 4.9% of the respondents choose under 1 year to be the period of migration (Figure 3). It is worth mentioning here that a

number of migrants are unable to return to their homeland to participate in production for a long time. Therefore, there will be a big shortage of labor force in the production process in the region. Here, we partly realize the general trend of the labor force of the two

communes. However, if this situation continues, the region will face a serious labor shortage. It is, thus, necessary to have appropriate measures to deal with this shortage.

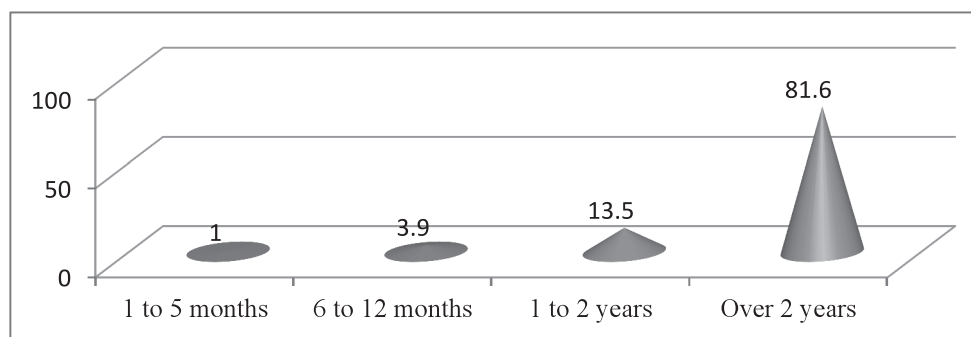


Figure 3: The amount of time of labor migration (%)

The influences of labor migration on the household's production are clearly described in the study. The main impact is a shortage of labor force in the main farming season with 97.7% of the respondents. Other effects are a shortage of managers accounting for 77.7% and a shortage of skilled labor accounting for 80.8%.

Table 6: Effects of labor migration on the household's production

| Effects  | Perceptions (%) |      |               |      | N<br>(People) | N<br>(%) |
|--|-----------------|------|---------------|------|---------------|----------|
|  | Agree           |      | Disagree      |      |               |          |
|  | N<br>(People)   | (%)  | N<br>(People) | (%)  |               |          |
| Shortage of labor force in the main farming season | 376             | 97.7 | 9             | 2.3  | 385           | 100.0    |
| Shortage of managers                               | 299             | 77.7 | 86            | 22.3 | 385           | 100.0    |
| Shortage of skilled labor                          | 311             | 80.8 | 74            | 19.2 | 385           | 100.0    |

Table 6 reveals that most of the households believe that labor migration has significant effects on the household's production. As analyzed in the previous part about labor transformation according to gender and age, before 2010, when Labor Export Scheme had not been approved yet, the main labor force in surveyed households were all in the working-age (18 to 45 years old), accounting for 95% of the total labor force. Therefore, in the main farming season of the year, the number of laborers participating in the household's production in particular and the region's production, in general, were relatively high. However, the figure has gradually decreased since 2010. At the

time of the survey in 2015, the number of households reporting shortage of labor force in the main farming season accounts for 97.7%. The data confirm that the migration process has created a big labor gap in households with the number of people moving to work in the centers, big cities inside and outside the country for a long time (more than 2 years). Therefore, most of the households have to hire other people to support and harvest the crop.

*“Because we work far away from the country, we are allowed to return to the homeland only for a few days during the Tet holiday. For some people, they have to*

wait until the end of their working time to return home. Therefore, the families of these migrants have to hire other people to support in the main crops.” (Focus Group Discussion - Group 2).

“In the main crops, especially during harvesting time, our family has to hire outside people to do most of the jobs. It is very hard when my husband is working abroad; I have to be responsible for heavy jobs, and I cannot handle every task in the family.” (In-depth interview, Female, 45 years old, Migrant).

It is undeniable that labor migration has positive effects on the households in the two communes. However, labor migration has brought negative effects on the labor restructuring process in rural areas. Most of the migrants are of working-age (18 – 45 years old) and the main labor force involved in the production process in each household in the main crops. Nevertheless, the fact that the main labor force moves to another place to work, leads to a serious lack of labor (the lack of labor in a specific time and for a specific task).

Human resources are specifically needed during harvesting time for tasks such as loading, transporting, unloading, harvesting rice and fishing, exploiting bamboo, etc. During this time, the main labor force migrates to another place; therefore, they cannot directly participate in the harvesting process and the next crop production. As a result, most of the households are forced to hire outside labor to assist with harvesting. Responses to the questionnaire reveal that, on average, 89.1% of the households with migrants have to hire labor in the main crop (11.8% for other crops). There are very few households that do not have to hire laborers in the main crop (10.9%) and other crops (11.8%). These modest figures are in the case of households with a lot of members, especially members of working age. Therefore, even though there are migrants in the family, the households still have other members participating in the production. Besides, the households having to hire labor during periods other than harvesting time are businessmen, agents of construction materials, and agricultural materials; therefore, the households always need to hire human resources. However, the number of these households account for a small portion of the research sample of the study.

**Table 7: The number of households with migrants hiring more labor inside and outside the crops**

| Surveyed Communes |     | The households in Hop Ly Commune |              | The households in Hop Thang Commune |              | On average |
|-------------------|-----|----------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------|
|                   |     | N (People)                       | (%)          | N(People)                           | (%)          |            |
| Inside the crops  | Yes | 177                              | 88.5         | 166                                 | 89.7         | 89.1       |
|                   | No  | 23                               | 11.5         | 19                                  | 10.3         | 10.9       |
| Outside the crops | Yes | 18                               | 9.0          | 27                                  | 14.6         | 11.8       |
|                   | No  | 182                              | 91.0         | 158                                 | 85.4         | 88.2       |
| <b>Total</b>      |     | <b>200</b>                       | <b>100.0</b> | <b>185</b>                          | <b>100.0</b> | <b>-</b>   |

“During the main crops of the year, it is very hard for our family to hire people to support the crop. Even though we offer the rate of 250,000 VND/day/person, no one wants to accept the job. Most of the families have 5 to 6 people, but two people are working far

away from home. The migrants are mostly young couples, and only the old people manage the tasks all year. Therefore, during the time of crops, no one helps to harvest.” (Focus Group Discussion - Group 2).

## Impacts on the Division of Labor in the Household

The study indicates that most of the migrants will have a great impact on family life because they are mostly in the working-age and are the main labor force in the family.

Therefore, without them, the burden is on the shoulders of other people in the family. The data on negative influences of labor migration has shown that labor migration has brought a shift in the division of labor in the family of migrants (accounting for 96.4%).

**Table 8: Impacts of Labor Migration on the Division of Labor in the Household**

| Negative impacts of labor migration               | Perception (%) |      |            |      | N (People) | %            |
|---|----------------|------|------------|------|------------|--------------|
|   | Agree          |      | Disagree   |      |            |              |
|   | N (People)     | (%)  | N (People) | (%)  |            |              |
| Changes in the division of labor                  | 371            | 96.4 | 14         | 3.6  | <b>385</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Changes in labor structure in the family          | 354            | 91.9 | 31         | 8.1  | <b>385</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Changes in the roles in the family                | 338            | 87.8 | 47         | 12.2 | <b>385</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Lack of people who are responsible for the family | 332            | 86.2 | 53         | 13.8 | <b>385</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

As mentioned above, Hop Ly and Hop Thang communes are purely agricultural communes in Trieu Son district. Particularly, in Hop Thang commune, the labor force involved in agricultural production is made up of mainly women. However, due to seasonal agricultural production with low income, the daily consumption demand of the family cannot be met; a large number of female laborers in the commune

migrates to another place to look for a job and increase the family's income.

Moreover, in recent years, there is a higher demand for female employees in the domestic and international labor market in light industries (textiles, leather shoes, etc.). As a result, the number of female migrants in the area increased significantly from 2010 to 2015 (the period under research).

**Table 9: Number of migrants by gender in the households in 2005, 2010 and 2015**

| Year                                | 2005       |              | 2010       |              | 2015       |              |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|                                     | N (People) | (%)          | N (People) | (%)          | N (People) | (%)          |
| Male                                | 85         | 66.9         | 148        | 45.1         | 174        | 45.2         |
| Female                              | 42         | 33.1         | 180        | 54.9         | 211        | 54.8         |
| <b>Number of migrant households</b> | <b>127</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>328</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>385</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Female migrants who left their homeland for employment in the domestic and international markets account for a large proportion of the migrants surveyed in the study. The number of migrants by gender has sharply changed. In the period 2005 to

2010, the number of female migrants in the area only accounted for 33.3% of total migrants, while the number of male migrants was 66.9% (in 2005). However, from 2010 to 2015, the number of female migrants increased to 54.9%, and male migrants rose

to 45.5% (in 2010). This figure remained stable in 2015 (the survey time). Therefore, in comparison with the figure in 2005, the number of female migrants in 2015 increased by 1.66 times while male migrants decreased by 1.48 times.

The migration of female workers has greatly affected the division of labor in the family. The number of laborers in the family reduced; therefore, other people had to do more work.

**Table 10: Impacts of Female migrants on the Family**

| Impacts                                    | Perceptions (%) |      |            |      | N (People) |       |
|--|-----------------|------|------------|------|------------|-------|
|  | Agree           |      | Disagree   |      | N (People) | %     |
|  | N (People)      | (%)  | N (People) | (%)  |            |       |
| Changes in responsibilities in the family  | 342             | 88.8 | 43         | 11.2 | 385        | 100.0 |
| Not enough care and education for children | 314             | 81.6 | 71         | 18.4 | 385        | 100.0 |

Table 10 indicates that 88.8% of the households having migrants believe that the migration of female labor will lead to changes in the responsibilities for housework in the family. Specifically, through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in the family having female migrants, it was inferred that the children, the old people (grandparents) and the husband in the family must undertake more work. Previously, when female workers had not migrated yet, these tasks were done by them. In addition to agricultural production, women also have to participate in many different areas such as housework, and taking care of children and relatives. However, after the migration, the responsibility of child care is placed on the shoulders of people at home; husbands have taken on this task and

are doing much more for the children than before the migration of female workers. These results are in line with previous studies; women have to take on two responsibilities (dual roles), in addition to housework, taking care of and educating children, they also have to take on the society work/activities, which increases the pressure of work intensity, creates stress, mental fatigue, and has a negative impact on the health of the woman (Harilal & Santosh, 2017).

On analyzing and evaluating the tasks undertaken by women when the husbands are away for work, the division of labor in the groups of households having female migrants is opposite to those in the groups of households having male migrants.

**Table 11: Assessment of Women's Participation in Household Chores**

| Women's participation | Household chores (%) |                  |                                    |
|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
|                       | Housework            | Production tasks | The care of children and relatives |
| Level 1               | 1.4                  | 8.9              | 1.8                                |
| Level 2               | 2.6                  | 6.5              | 3.3                                |
| Level 3               | 8.0                  | 14.1             | 6.1                                |
| Level 4               | 12.0                 | 16.7             | 8.6                                |
| Level 5               | 76.0                 | 53.8             | 80.2                               |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>100.0</b>         | <b>100.0</b>     | <b>100.0</b>                       |

(Level 1 indicates the lowest participation; Level 5 indicates the highest participation)

Majority of women (76.0%) undertake housework. For production tasks, 53.8% of surveyed people claim that the involvement of women is quite high, while only 6.5% of the respondents believe that women's participation is the lowest. Moreover, women's involvement in the care of children and relatives is considered as the highest with 80.2%.

*“The housework and childcare in the family have been long ago implied to be women's responsibilities. The women have to undertake both family and social work; therefore, they have less time to take care of their health. Meanwhile, when their husbands migrate to another place to work, these responsibilities are much harder with the division of labor between the couple changing and more burden being put on the women's shoulder again.”*(Semi-structured interview, Female, 39 years old, Commune officer).

Thus, the research results once again confirm that in families with the husband working in another place, most of the work in the homeland is carried out by his wife. The division of labor in the family changes, with women having to work harder. Meanwhile, these women are still involved in other social activities (Rashid, 2013; Gaetano, 2013; Ullah, 2017). This conclusion has also been confirmed in previously reported studies on the impact of migration. The departure of highly qualified and dynamic labor brings an abundant source of labor for economic development of urban areas; however, the population in the countryside constitutes mainly women, elder people, and children. The more developed society is, lower is the rate of birth, and higher is the number of elderly people; this has resulted in lesser number of young laborers, which leaves a heavy burden on older people in the countryside. This situation is actually happening in a large number of neighboring countries (Le, 2011).

### **Applicability and Generalizability**

Migration is a widespread phenomenon that has taken place throughout human history, reflecting the laws of development. Migration plays an active role in

economic growth, making an important contribution to poverty reduction and improvement of living standards of households working away from home. At a higher level, labor migration contributes to changes in human capital, promotes growth, enhances labor productivity, and transforms labor structure. In recent years, Vietnam has made great efforts and implemented positive policies to create jobs through labor restructuring under the impact of migration. With these experiences in Vietnam, it is possible to replicate and consider as experience for many other countries around the world, especially those located in Asia with similar starting points as primarily agricultural countries belonging to the group of developing countries and emerging economies such as India, Thailand, Japan, Philippines, etc.

A typical example, India is a country with many migrant and transit workers. Migrant workers are estimated to contribute about 10% to the national GDP through key sectors such as construction, textile, small industry, and hotel services. Most employers employ a system of contractors and agents to employ illiterate and poor labor (including adults and children). The lack of information and lax enforcement of labor laws implies a great potential for improving the lives of migrant workers (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). Therefore, the necessary lesson here is that it is necessary to support migrant workers and reduce vulnerability by improving access to education, housing, and health programs, giving migrants the opportunity, income benefits, risk reduction, and alleviation from poverty.

According to the United Nations International Migration Report (2017), the number of international migrants throughout the world has increased significantly from 173 million in 2000 to 258 million in 2017. In 2017, more than 78 million people migrated. International residents live in Europe, Asia (80 million), and Africa (25 million). Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Philippines, Iraq, and Iran, etc. are now the countries with the highest proportion of labor migration in the world. These countries are currently facing many challenges on protecting the rights of



workers and maximize the development benefits of migration. The challenges are related to migration costs, errors in recruitment, and inadequate regulations to manage labor migration, lack of transparent policies, and cooperation among migrant countries. The lesson that can be learned is that there is a need to have policies to support legal migration, a specific contract of employment with the recruitment partner, recruitment field, employment terms, benefits, and responsibilities.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Labor migration has multi-dimensional impacts, which are both positive and negative on the current rural development in Thanh Hoa province. It cannot be denied that there have been a number of positive benefits brought to the economic development of the household in particular and the whole community in general; however, the drawbacks of labor migration also cause problems affecting the labor structure in the current households.

First, to implement the employment program for employees, the Government, as well as local government, need to pay attention to vocational and professional training, improve cognitive skills for the labor in the commune, especially the youth. The enhancement of skills of suitable professions for the region enables the laborers to expand their local small businesses. Another essential issue is the improvement of education and knowledge for rural workers, especially women and young people, which provides a basic intellectual capital, the most valuable asset for workers looking for a job with limited capital and without initial facilities. Thanks to this support, it is much easier for the workers to find jobs in different places. Besides, they are also more dynamic, flexible, and attentive, and quickly integrate into a new environment and improve their skills as well as experiences, which helps to increase income for migrants.

Second, the investments in developing agriculture and rural infrastructure have had impacts on the pace of

labor restructuring. It is, therefore, necessary to have a policy to enhance the upgrading and improvement of infrastructure on a scientifically planned basis in rural areas. Despite indirect influences on labor restructuring, this policy is extremely important for the development of the rural agricultural. Market diversifies occupational sectors and reduces the rate of agricultural labor.

Third, the communes need to have guidelines on population redistribution and labor restructuring among different sectors and regions according to each program or project in different periods. The right path is to gradually move the labor in a purely agricultural sector to industrial, commercial and service sectors.

Fourth, to enhance the quality of human resources and vocational training, it is, first, necessary to combine vocational training with the labor demands of enterprises to orient human resources training. Therefore, in the coming time, the communes should have strategies to improve the quality of human resources comprehensively. The enhancement of knowledge and skills for the laborers to ensure labor restructuring is an urgent and long-term requirement of a “breakthrough” in the industrialization and modernization strategy of the local economy.

Fifth, the improvement in the laborer's awareness and access to employment policies under the impact of labor migration has led to the lack of skilled labor in Central Vietnam. Therefore, it is important to train human resources with the skills, including knowledge, techniques, and methods to access employment policies, to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization.

### **Limitations of research**

The process of rural labor transformation is affected by many factors such as urbanization policies, policies on training as well as the development of rural human resources, policies on rural infrastructure areas, policies on credit and finance, etc. However, we only consider the impact of labor migration on labor

restructuring from the perspective of households having to hire more workers when there are migrants, and this fact affects the size and structure of household labor. In terms of limitations, the study has not been able to consider the labor restructuring process at the

destination. That is the limitation of this study. Naturally, this topic is not just a one-time study; it needs to be considered in terms of space and time. This is also a further research direction in the research area.

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