

Vietnam's Education - The Current Position and Future Prospects

“We should grow trees for ten years’ interests and grow man for one hundred years’ interests.” [quoting Ho Chi Minh] p viii

‘Vietnamese education... climaxed in the second half of the 20th century with the appearance of people’s education – a comprehensive system of national education.’ p ix

‘..... learning was performed under the principle: to learn for the sake of deeds, to know for the sake of action, to link education with the people’s like, to achieve an harmonious development of personalities, especially the thirst for knowledge; and to use scientific education as an instrument for national liberation in the ideological field.

Education has a *mass character* because it is duty-bound to bring knowledge to the masses to bring the latter from illiteracy to literacy, to gradually popularize a determined level of education; for instance, to universalize first primary, the junior secondary education, etc., to bring scientific knowledge to the broad masses who are to apply it to life and production.’ pp 9-10

‘..... learning was compulsory and free in order to urgently eradicate illiteracy because ignorance was one of the three enemies to be liquidated, namely poverty, ignorance and foreign aggression.’ pp 10-11

‘..... lack of education was a dangerous enemy to the same extent as foreign invasion and poverty, and the raising of the people’s intellectual standard was one of the pressing tasks of that period [post-September 2, 1945].’ p 13

‘Education direction: study going along with action; theory being closely combined with practice.’ p 14

‘The education direction was to link theory with practice, school to social life.

With regard to the education methods: they are to strengthen practical studies, to increase the time devoted to productive labour, to pay greater attention to the application of know how to life.’ p 17

‘At the threshold of a new period of national construction and defence [post Spring 1975], reassessing the past few decades of education

development, we note that in spite of very significant achievements, education is still of low quality and not commensurate with the development of society, science and technology; it fails to meet the new requirements of the period of post-war reconstruction.’ p 18

‘..... to regard education as an important part of the ideological and cultural revolution, an important factor boosting the development of the economy, culture, science and technology.’ p 18

‘To better implement the principles “study along with practice”, “education combined with production”, “school linked to society”. Production in secondary schools bears the character of combined technologies.’ p 19

‘[Since 1993] (E)ight private colleges have been established besides the public establishments of higher education. Those students who can afford to cater to their own sustenance and school fees may go abroad for studies.’ p 22

‘2) Voluntarism has been gradually overcome. The initial objective of universalizing secondary education (up to the 12th grade) has been lowered to be more practical. Great efforts are to be made if the eradication of illiteracy and the universalization of primary education are to be completed by the end of this decade [by the year 2000]. The percentage of attendance by children who have reached the age of going to junior and senior secondary school is still low. College students and qualified workers were in small number; there were very few vocational training schools.’ p 24

‘4) One major shortcoming in the past was lack of measures to reform the education method which is now the most conservative factor: the teacher reads, the pupil takes note; main reliance is on memory instead of thinking, study is made in a passive way. There was a serious shortage of school equipment to renovate the method of teaching and learning.’ p 25

5) There was a serious shortage of school buildings and teaching implements. For many classes, teaching was given in three shifts/day. Few schools met the criteria as to school hygiene (inadequate lighting, shortage of table and benches appropriate for certain pupils’ age). In some places, testing instruments were not used and maintained in a proper way.

- 6) Teachers encountered great difficulties in their life and had to engage in sidelines to get supplementary earnings.....
- 7) The State budget allocations for education were low. Receipts from other sources (NGO, community) were also limited. In many years, the budget distributions earmarked for education by the National Assembly and the Government failed to be fully realized.’ pp 25-26

‘The VIIth Congress (April 1991) put forward a new Programme and a Strategy of socio-economic stabilization and development until the year 2000, mapping out in broad lines the particular features of socialism in Vietnam designed to make the people rich, the country powerful, the society fair and civilized. The renovation line is expressed by the shift from the subsidy-based mechanism to the market orientated one, the development of an open multi-sector and socialist-orientated economy under State management. It has brought the country to a new development stage. This is a period of development of education along the renovation line (which may also be called a period of adjustment of the third education reform).’ p 27

‘Imbalance between the socio-economic development and the development of education; between the wish to serve a rapid growth of education and the low investment in this field; between the need to increase school attendance and the possibility of ensuring good quality for education; between the intention to universalize at once secondary general education in the whole country and the implementation conditions.’ p 28

‘..... a new approach to education is required in the first place.

A/ First, it is necessary to overcome the vision of education only as a part of the ideological-cultural revolution.....

B/ Second, it is necessary to do away with the opinion regarding investment for education merely as a kind of welfare fund to which one may allocate at will any amount of money.....

Accordingly investment in education must be the same as that in communications and post and tele-communications. Stress has been laid on the joint creation of investment sources by the State and the people.

E/ Fifth, to lay particular stress on the decisive role of the teacher in the development of good education.’ pp 29-31

‘To adopt diversified flexible forms of schools and classes.

The teacher must be really good one, carry out good teaching; schools and classes must be really good ones.’ pp 31-32

‘.... To reform the higher education and vocational training: to open various forms of school, to “soften” the training process, to create education units, to work out mechanisms of conversion.’ p 34

‘... to prepare a new generation of labourers having a higher standard, with, at the head, a contingent of talented people, and to achieve social justice.’ p 36

a/ Generally speaking, the disintegration of schools and classes, job quitting by teachers and class abandoning by pupils have been stopped. The education system has been consolidated and has begun to develop.

b/ Schools and classes are opened everywhere in diversified forms: family nurseries, private infant schools, all-day primary classes, evening class centres, vocational centres, flexible classes to universalize primary education, evening literacy classes, “B network” [In the beginning, this network is intended for students who had to pay school fee] classes in junior secondary and private and semi-private senior secondary schools, private colleges, open university, subject-orientated schools and specialized schools... All these establishments are included in a nationwide system of education.’ p 38

‘e/ In some communes or districts, people’s contribution to education is equal to or greater than the funds earmarked for this purpose from the State budget.

f/ With regard to the quality of education, there is a continued polarization (some schools are very good, others are very bad. The gap between them is enlarging.’ p 40

‘The scale of values in society, especially among the youth and students, is being upturned. Some people are speaking of a crisis, of individuals and pragmatistic tendencies and rush for money [Pham Minh Hac, *Man as Problem of the Renovation*, Hanoi, 1994]. Social ideals rank low in the scale of values. The problem is that at a time of major socio-economic changes, attention is not fully paid to the orientation of social

values [Pham Minh Hac, *To orientate Social Values, to Strengthen Moral Education*, Nhan Dan, April 20, 1996].’ p 41

‘There are the following forms of school:

b/ *Semi-public school*: organized and managed by the State; the school enjoys financial autonomy and are to see by themselves to all receipts and expenses....

d/ *Private school*: organized and managed by individuals who make investments in material facilities and see themselves to all receipts and expenses.’ p 45

‘Right in the years of the Vietnam-US war, the Prime Minister issued a Directive (August 12, 1966) which stated: “greater attention is now being paid to work of creates and infant schools in order to protect the life and health of children, and create favourable conditions for women to assume heavier and heavier tasks in the struggle against US aggression for national salvation.” p 57

Figure 5a. *Development of creates*

School Year	Number of children	Number of nurses	Number of creates and nurseries
1971	561,123	72,142	37,314
1975	550,810	78,590	33,040
1980	1,246,473	167,820	46,763
1985	1,157,684	160,578	41,977
1986	1,127,831	157,964	40,597
1989-			
1990	633,919	101,246	13,348
1990-			
1991	545,987		

Ministry of Education (1986) and Ministry of education and Training (1996)

P 57

‘Tasks, objectives, programs of pre-school education

Achieving a close cooperation with families in caring for and educating children.’ p 58

‘... take the mother-daughter-like sentiments between nurses and children as a decisive factor.’ p 59

‘Family child-keeping groups

These are child-keeping groups for children below 6 years of age, organized in a family according to a mode agreed upon between the child-minder and the family sending the children there.’ p 62

‘Short-term infant classes for 5-year-old children

These classes.... are reserved for the children whose families do not want or cannot afford to send them to school on a daily basis.’

‘Creates and infant schools are most developed in towns and cities. However, they cannot fully meet the needs of families as to the custody of children. there are usually more children in groups’ custody than the stipulated number (occasionally one and a half time more).

All major enterprises possess creates and infant schools for their daytime shift workers’ children. Although difficulties are encountered here because children do not come on a continuing basis whenever their parents pass to a new shift. Mothers prefer to bring their children here because it is more convenient and less expensive (on account of the support extended by the enterprise’s welfare fund).

The rural creates and infant schools in the delta area are fairly developed. But the number of children varies depending on the state of crops and the living standard of local peasants.

In mountainous areas..... is not much developed.

In recent years, on account of multiple economic difficulties and as the economic renovation according to an adjusted market mechanism is only at an early stage while the subsidy-based administration mechanism is being abolished, the number of creates and infant schools and of children attending them is declining. More particularly, there is a marked reduction in the sector of creates. However, the number of children attending creates and infant schools has increased.

In the face of this, the Ministry of Education and Training advocates, on the one hand, the strengthening of the remaining creates and infant

schools, and on the other, a diversification of the forms of organizations attending to the education of children. The purpose is to increase to the maximum, in spite of the difficulties, the number of children cared for, and educated in a scientific way.....

5.2 With regard to quality, significant progress has been made in the education of children in the main creates and infant schools. Children enjoy periodic check-ups, great care is taken in the field of nutrition. The malnutrition rate has been markedly lowered (20-15%); in some places, it is kept at 5-7%. On the whole, children have an all-round development. they are at ease in entertainment activities. generally speaking, creates and infant schools have made progress, but the work is encountering many difficulties.

The nutrition conditions are very poor, and as a result the malnutrition rate is high (46%). In some places, the meals have declined in quality on account of the material difficulties encountered by families. In many creates and infant schools, the material facilities are very poor. Nurses and teachers lack adequate training. As a result, the program of care and education for children is not fully carried out. In some places, the hygiene conditions are poor: (rooms are humid, inadequately lit, clean water is in short supply).

The child-keeping groups are of unequal quality. On the whole, the hygiene conditions are good. Children enjoy good care. But nurses lack the required scientific knowledge. Children are often let [sic] to play by themselves with a poor number of toys.’ pp 64-66

‘On September 8, 1945, the Vietnamese Government issued a Decree on the setting up of a teaching office and asserted that study was compulsory and free in order to diligently eradicate illiteracy.’ p 71

‘Achievement of equality between the two sexes in education.

The policy of education for everybody reserves great priority to the disadvantaged groups: children of ethnic minorities, handicapped children, orphans, and street children in order to increase equality and justice in learning opportunities and to contribute to the democratization of education.

Particular attention is to be paid to the eradication of illiteracy and universalization of primary education among women and young girls..... many people have recognized that in the development process we have

managed to do away partly with the inequality in education among various social strata, ethnic groups, localities and between the two sexes....

However, due to prolonged wars and other complex causes, the education branch is being confronted with great, acute challenges, among others, the relapse into illiteracy and inequality in education, including inequality between the two sexes.....

Drop-outs are mainly girls..... The market mechanism is threatening this equality; measures are required to check this process.’ pp 75-76

‘... as primary education has not been universalized, the additional source of illiterates cannot be checked.’ p 78

‘... over 80% of school-age children are going to school, and over one million children do not attend school. in addition, nearly one million primary school children abandon study, right from the first and second form, although there has been over the recent years a marked decline in the number of dropouts and class-repeating pupils.’ p 78

‘During a long period, the education and training services were slow in renovating their conceptions and styles of work. the endeavour to eradicate illiteracy was made independently of the universalization of primary education.’ p 79

‘At present, more than 80% of school-age children are attending school, and there remain over one million children who do not go to school.’ p 81

‘... the learning movement reached a climax at the triumph of the Revolution and at the end of the war.’ p 86

‘In 1991 Vietnam promulgated the Law on the universalization of the first level of education and the Law on the protection and care for children, asserting the State’s commitment to a compulsory and free primary education for all children and stipulating conditions to ensure children’s exercise of their right to education.’ p 88

‘Content of education

Comprehensive study constituted the most important activity to develop primary school-age children’s personality. This is to cultivate in pupils a

need for and an interest in study and the collective life, and give shape to good feelings, knowledge, attitudes and habits. these are initial bases required for the gradual promotion of the ideals and ethics of the new Vietnamese man.

The quality of general education largely depends on the training results in primary schools....

Attitude

To hate aggressors, reactionaries and their lackeys, the enemies of national independence, social progress and world peace.’ pp 89-91

‘To have a liking for collective labour, manual work; to show a sense of discipline and responsibility;

To respect labourers; to wish to become good labourers to enrich oneself, the family and the native land.’ p 95

‘[In secondary education] To refrain from circulating and using reactionary, corrupt cultural and artistic items.’ p 114

‘.... to hate the selfish and debauched way of life running after debased enjoyment and falling into social evils.’ p 120

‘The transformation of senior secondary schools into subject-specialized ones is encountering difficulties. Firstly, some people do not think that subject-specialized programs do not ensure all-round education. Secondly, the special budget earmarked for this purpose has been cut and no money is available for the purchase of the equipment required for the teaching of specialized subjects, especially with regard to the natural science-technology section.’ p 133

‘The special senior secondary schools for gifted pupils recruit outstanding graduates of junior secondary schools who are to follow the common program of senior secondary schools.’ p 134

‘..... as pupils have grown up in a country with agriculture being the main economy, their empirical thinking is still weak.’ p 135

‘As a result of this extremely rapid growth [of secondary vocational training after 1965], the quality of training was low, especially with regard to practical experience and knowledge. a decision was taken to

narrow down the training scale to fit in with the possibility of ensuring quality.’ p 138

‘In 1975, the anti-US resistance war ended in victory, the country was reunified. Vietnam entered a new stage of development on a nation-wide scale; the requirement for technicians and workers became pressing, and thus the training network expanded.’ p 139

‘... in view of its too rapid formation in the previous period, it was distributed in an irrational way. Many schools had very poor material facilities and failed to ensure good training; as a result, they had to be disbanded or merged into other units.’ p 140

‘In addition to public craft-teaching units, private schools and classes have been opened in various localities and production units.’ p 140

‘The number of pupils attending secondary vocational and craft-teaching schools has been increasing on a small scale and the number of pupils of craft-teaching schools has been continuously decreasing in the course of the 10 years of education renovation. This is a major imbalance in the training structure. It fails to meet the requirements of the industrialization of the country.’ p 142

‘In spite of the need to support the struggle for the liberation of the Southern part of the country and for national reunification and to fight back the US air war of destruction, the network of universities and colleges continued to develop.’ p 152

‘This system made an important contribution to the training of technicians for the economic, cultural and social development of the country.’ p 153

‘Other forms of universities and colleges

The Open Universities of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. They are semi-public schools (the installations belong to the State, the schools enjoy financial autonomy);.....

The community-founded colleges are schools sponsored by a social organization. They operate on the principle of self-management in financial matters and material facilities. the school management board decides school fees and salaries for teachers (most of them are lecturers and professors from public schools).’ p 157

‘... it is a policy of the Government to encourage the families which can afford to send their children for study abroad.’ p 162

‘... the population of our country in 1995 was about 75 million; 49.6% of them were those from new borns to 19-years-olds and 45.5% are those in the age bracket of 20-59.....

.... in 1997 Vietnam’s population was about 77 million.’ p 166

‘At present only 12% of the total labour force have undergone training. This is a major problem in the socio-economic development plan, a big task for the training establishments all over the country.’ p 167

‘The training structure must be reconsidered: structure with regard to standards (scale of various levels of learning), structure of technical branches, social structure of students, structure of localities (including ethnic groups), sex structure. At present there is too low percentage of students of peasant family.’ p 169

‘The labour, wage and reward policy as a basis for implementing the principle of interest is a motive force of paramount importance in the mobilization of the labour force to develop the country along the socialist orientation. the creation of a motive force to stimulate the working and social activeness of labours. To instil in them dynamism, good will, aspiration for progress (ambition), and creativity is an extremely important problem in both the macro- and micromanagement of human resources and of the labour force. certainly, this includes the policies on wages, rewards, remuneration and human relations. However, account is to be taken not solely of material interests, the moral interests are also of paramount importance. Consequently, patriotism, national pride, vocational passion and consciousness, confidence, freedom, democracy, social justice, etc., are very powerful motive forces which lead men to dynamism, application, dedication to our common cause, increased productivity, adaptation and creativity. That is precisely a guarantee for the development of man, the country, and mankind. To attend to and foster human resources is the most important part in the strategy towards man, the central task of education in Vietnam in the forthcoming years.

This is to create fundamental conditions for industrialization and modernization to make the people rich, the country strong, the society fair and civilized, and to ensure for everybody and every family welfare and happiness.

[See Pham Minh Hac, *Human resource - the decisive factor in the achievement of the objective for a rich people, a strong country and a fair and civilized society*, in the book *Such is Vietnam, Part II*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 1997.]’ p 172

‘This year is the third one of implementation of a primary education project carried out with a World bank credit of US\$ 80 million. The World Bank is actively preparing and finalizing a project on higher education.’ p 177

‘... The amount contributed by the population for the building of schools is very great and this reflects the people’s traditional attachment to learning.’ p 180

‘Although the State, the Government and the local administration together with the people have made efforts to build schools, tens of thousands of classes have had so far to operate in 3 shifts/day. The number of school buildings in the category of not solid ones is rather big. There is a shortage of blackboards. Pupils' tables and benches not up to the standard still account for a great percentage. The expenditures made by populations and communal administrations on the construction of primary and basic general schools are bigger than the appropriations by the provincial and central administrations to build schools for other levels of learning.’ p 180

‘Since 1990-1991 school year, in accordance with a decision of the National Assembly, all primary school pupils have been exempted from school fees. Pupils of junior secondary education schools are required to pay fees equivalent to the price of 1kg of rice per month. Pupils of senior secondary schools have to pay fees equivalent to the price of 2kg of rice per month, calculated according to the local prices at the time of collecting the school fees. The school fees are collected for 9-10 months a year. Poor pupils and pupils from families enjoying preferential policies of treatment (families having rendered outstanding services to the country, children of heroic mothers, fallen soldiers or war invalids) are entitled to fee-exemption or fee reduction. In the whole country, the number of such pupils account for one third of the total number. Since 1987, in the senior secondary school, besides the pupils enrolling in keeping with the stipulations of the service of education and training (called the A system), various schools have enrolled a number of so-called B system pupils who are required to pay higher school fees. Over the past years, the school fees collected have been left at the disposal of

the schools concerned, partly to increase the teachers' incomes, and partly to purchase school equipment.

At the start, universities and colleges had also an A and a B system like senior secondary schools. Subsequently, beginning in 1993-1994, these establishments have put into practice school fees applicable to all students. The fees are not the same in all schools; many of them collect fees equivalent to the price of 20kg of rice (about 50,000 dong)[1998 prices?]. The amounts collected are left at the disposal of the school; they may be equal to or greater than the State budget appropriations for the school concerned.' pp 181-182

'As the budget appropriations for education are limited and meet only 26 to 65% of the requirements of the school activities, almost all schools, availing themselves of the "market mechanism", have created in the past years many kinds of receipts from students. Among other things, mention must be made, in the first place of the funds raised for the construction and protection of schools, the funds of the association of students' parents, and others. All these funds are raised and expended by the schools themselves. This state of affairs is not approved by most people because it creates a burden for poor families, and in some cases, compel students to quit studies due to lack of money to make contributions. This kind of "self-management of finance" has affected the prestige of teachers and schools. Under the Government's Directives, the education management echelons are taking step to deal with the situation laying down formal stipulations on the collection of contributions, the utilization of the money collected, and public announcement to the students' parents and the teachers of the school.

Over recent years, a movement has launched to set up at central and local level various funds to encourage good or poor pupils. A number of Overseas Vietnamese and foreign companies having made investment in Vietnam have granted rewards or scholarships to outstanding pupils or students.' p 182

'Since 1990, the Vietnamese Government has allowed the creation of people-founded schools at all levels.'
[See table on page 183] p 183

'Since 1984, the 20th November has been instituted as "Vietnam Teachers' Day".' p 184

'..... few good pupils want to enter teachers' training colleges.' p 187

‘Since the August 1945 Revolution, Vietnam’s education has overcome many difficulties and trials, developed in a continuous way, and recorded important achievements. The country and the people are proud of their education, of the nationwide system of schools which has given rise to several generations of men, promoters of the cause of national independence and unity, who have undertaken the renovation of the country and pursued the objective of making the people rich, the country strong, the society fair and civilized and of building socialism.’
pp 189-190

- 3.2 By the year 200, to ensure that almost all five-year-old children attend infant schools.....
- 3.3 By the year 2000 to complete the eradication of illiteracy among grown-up people...
- 3.4 To achieve the universalization of primary education in the whole country (in 2000), of junior secondary education (in 2010), and of senior secondary education (in 2020).’ p 193

‘To promote the positive influence and limit the negative effects of the market mechanism with regard to education and training. To oppose the “commercialization” trend, to prevent the trend to depoliticize education and training. Not to propagate religion in schools.’ p 195

‘To preserve the nucleus role of public schools while diversifying the forms of education and training on the basis of a unified State management with regard to the content of teaching, rules for learning and programs, examinations, diplomas, the criteria of teachers; to make it possible for everybody to choose a way of learning in accordance with his or her requirements and circumstances. To develop semi-public and community schools wherever possible, to open step by step private schools in a number of learning levels: infant schools, senior secondary schools (third level), specialized secondary schools, craft-teaching schools, universities and colleges.’ p 196

‘To gradually increase the percentage of budget appropriations for education and training to reach 15% in the year 2000 and higher figures in subsequent years.’ p 197

‘To put into effect a policy to attract good students into the pedagogical branch.’ p 197

‘To put into practice policies which reflect the high esteem of society for teachers; to improve their living condition (teachers’ salaries rank highest in the scale of administrative salaries; they are supplemented with various subsidies).’ p 197

‘To strengthen civic, ideological and moral education and the study of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and Ho Chi Minh Thought.’ p 198

‘... to make an appropriate step-ahead of the socio-economic development, to create a fundamental internal strength of a whole nation, of each community and each person, to cause the country to develop along the socialist orientation through education and training, science and technology..... “Social justice has not been well achieved in education. The children of poor families encounter many difficulties when they want to pursue higher studies. In universities and colleges, the percentage of students from poor families, those of workers or peasants, especially peasants of remote localities and ethnic minority areas have been declining”.’ p 202

‘The higher the grade, the smaller the number of schoolgirls. Among illiterates, the number of females is double that of males.’ p 203

‘5/ In rural areas, especially in remote ones, the number of good teachers is becoming smaller and smaller. Generally speaking, the teaching conditions are not so good as in urban areas, most grades with three shifts/day are concentrated here (there are over 20,000 classes of this kind in the whole country). Textbooks exist in insufficient number. Pupils’ study time, both at school and at home, is shorter than in urban areas and in the regions having good learning traditions.

6/ In a number of establishments of higher education, there is a marked decline in the percentage of students of rural origin.

7/ In rural areas, especially in remote ones, pupils do not enjoy a comprehensive education.’ p 203

‘The poor should receive the assistance of the State and the community to carry out study.’ p 204

‘The experience of the past years shows that for those regions, which, in spite of great difficulties and low receipts, managed to eradicate illiteracy

and to universalize primary education and to ensure a strong development of education, a good local policy was a decisive factor.' p 205