



EDUCATION REFORM IN VIETNAMESE HIGH SCHOOL: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND CHALLENGES

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Presentation Outline

- **History of Educational Development – Milestones**
- **First education reform: 1950**
- **Second education reform: 1956**
- **Third education reform: 1980**
- **Some remarks**
- **Discussion**

History of Educational Development - Milestones

- Promotion of learning and respect for teachers are one of the traditional values of the Vietnamese people: The first exam for civil administrators was conducted in 1075
- For nearly one thousand years, Vietnamese people learnt Chinese characters and used them for writing, but pronounced them in a different, Vietnamese way and besides the use of Chinese characters, the Vietnamese people adapted such characters to invent an ancient Vietnamese script for writing and expressions
- Thanks to this, a number of valuable works of literature and history in ancient Vietnamese script have been kept for future generations.

History of Educational Development - Milestones



50. Trường thi - Champ de concours (le petit journal 1895)

History of Educational Development - Milestones

- At the end of 19th and first half of 20th centuries, the French forcibly colonized Vietnam and the entire Indochina. The traditional Confucian-oriented education, which had been built and maintained by Vietnamese people, was replaced by French-Vietnamese education aimed mainly at training people to serve the colonial apparatus.



History of Educational Development - Milestones

- At the most prosperous period of French - invaded Indochina, Vietnam had
 - 2,322 elementary schools (first 3 years of primary education) with an average of one elementary school for every three villages, and the number of students accounted for 2% of total population;
 - 638 primary schools (2 last years of primary education) with the number of students making up 0.4% of total population;
 - 16 primary colleges (for 4 years of post-primary education) with students accounting for 0.05% of population;
 - 6 secondary schools of which 3 were public with only 0.019% of the population as state secondary students.
- The whole of French-colonized Indochina (Vietnam, Lao and Cambodia) had only 3 universities (of Law, Medicine-Pharmacy and Sciences) located in Hanoi with 834 students, of which 628 were Vietnamese;
- Under the French-Vietnamese education system, French was the dominant language and the language of instruction at the higher education level
- With such an education system, 95% of Vietnamese people were illiterate.

History of Educational Development - Milestones

- On 6 December 1945, President Ho Chi Minh sent an open letter to students on the occasion of the opening of the 1945-1946 school year, confirming the birth of a new education system with its mission to preserve independence and rehabilitate the country
- Then, on October 1945, President Hochiminh issued the “Call for Anti- illiteracy”
- Within less than a year, 75 thousand literacy classes with nearly 96 thousand teachers to help 2.5 million people get out of illiteracy.

History of Educational Development - Milestones



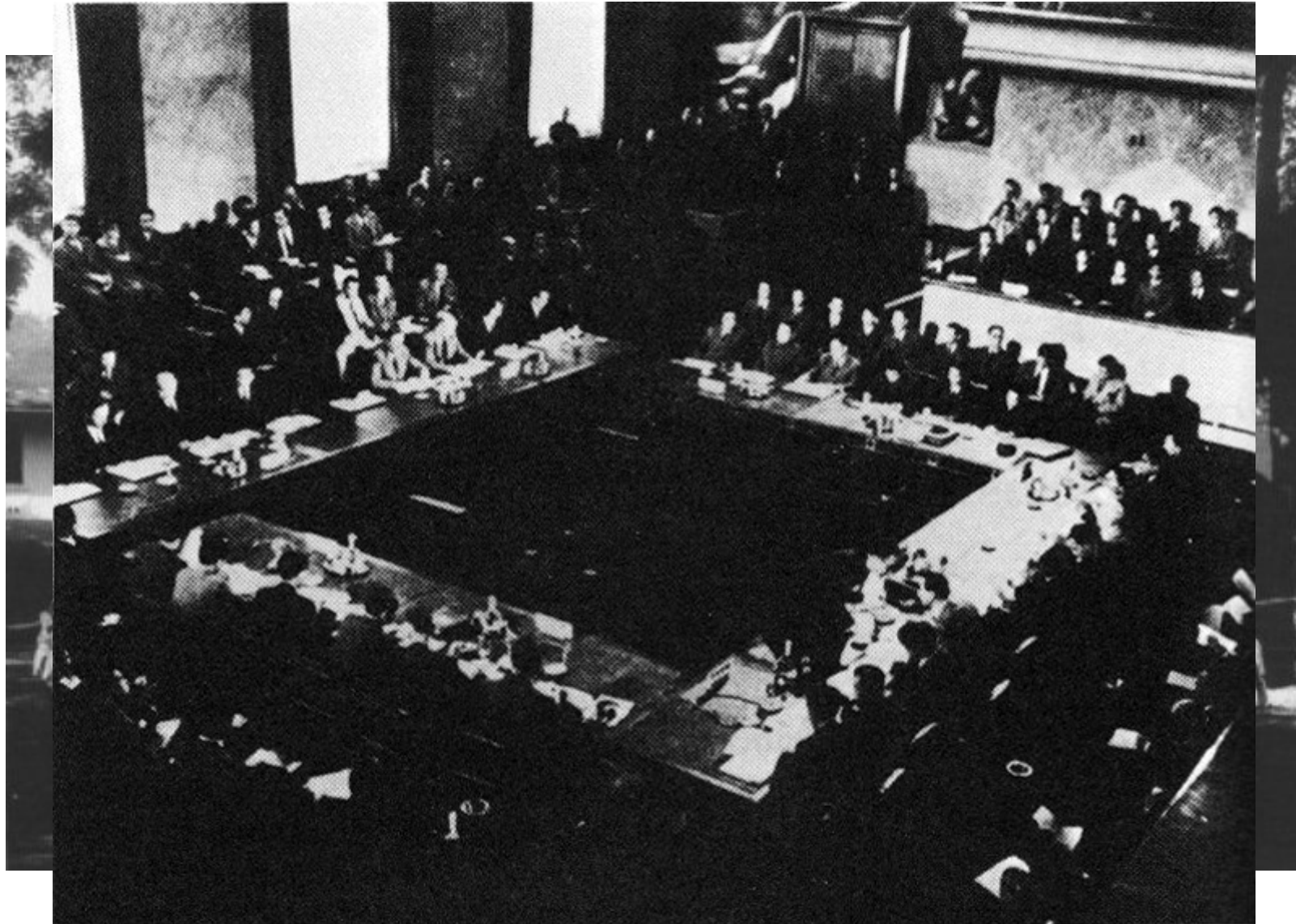
History of Educational Development - Milestones

- Two important decrees, namely Decrees No.146-SL and No.147-SL in 1946 which defined principles and system of Vietnamese education
- Three fundamental principles: *national, scientific, and popular*
- Aime: serving the *national ideals and democracy*
- System:
 - *First level*, the basic education level, in 4 years
 - *Second level*, with two sub-sectors: (i) general, including two sub-levels of 4-year general education and 3-year specialized education; (ii) specialization, including two sub-levels of 1-year experiment and 1-3-year vocational education (depending on each stream)
 - *Third level*, with universities (including literature, sciences, laws, etc.) and specialized colleges of at least 3 years. Next to universities were “research institutes”.

History of Educational Development - Milestones

- From 1950:
 - Basic education level would be compulsory.
 - All subjects would be taught in Vietnamese
- During the years of resistance war (1946-1954), schools continued to operate in demilitarized areas. In temporarily occupied areas, schools taught a 12-year curriculum which was based on one adjusted by several patriotic scholars at the beginning of 1945.
- First education reform project in 1950

History of Educational Development - Milestones



History of Educational Development - Milestones

- ***Years of Temporary Separation (1955-1975)***
 - In the North, the Vietnamese Government took over the education system in the newly liberated areas and actively prepared for a new education reform in the context of economic rehabilitation, building the North and the fight for the reunification of the whole country.
 - The second education reform project in 1956



History of Educational Development - Milestones

- ***Years of Temporary Separation (1955-1975)***

In the South during 1954-1975 period, within Saigon Government-controlled and subsequently liberated areas:

- In Saigon Government-controlled areas, education gradually transitioned from European and French-influenced education to North American-dominated education. General education experienced several changes with the components of primary education (5 years), lower secondary education (4 years), and upper secondary education (3 years) including many streams.
- In liberated areas students followed 12-year curriculum with textbooks that were very different from those used in temporarily occupied areas, demonstrating patriotic and resistance spirits.

History of Educational Development - Milestones



History of Educational Development - Milestones

- ***10 Years of Pre-Reform (1975-1985)***

Two tasks:

- Removal of leftover influences from the old education system;
 - (ii) implementation of anti- illiteracy activities for people in the age group of 12-50 years old.
 - the Government prepared for an education reform to put in place a unified national education system started in 1981-1982 school year with a 12 years system
- 1975-1986: **Centrally planned economy**
 - 1980: the third education project
 - 1986: Policy “**Open the door**”

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3 Education reforms: a closer look

- In 1950
- In 1956
- In 1980

Three projects are related to political and ideological reasons accordingly to the historic and important victories of the country (1945, 1954 and 1975).

- Project of the 4th education reform: going on

First education reform: 1950

- The education system was proclaimed of the people, by the people and for the people
- Characteristics was an education system national, scientific and mass character
- Training objective for schools was defined as educating and fostering the younger generation to become future citizens, loyal to people's democracy regime, and competent to serve people and the resistance war
- The main contents of the reform were to transform the structure of general education (reduced number of years from 11 to 9) and to adjust the relationship between various components of the education system in order to make it consistent with such a transformation.

First education reform: 1950

- Education direction: study going along with action, theory being closely combined with practice
- Content of general education: to concentrate on a number of subjects such as Vietnamese language literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology; and to introduce new subjects like new-policy, civics, and production, several subjects were suspended (such as foreign languages, music, drawing, housework)
- General education consisted of three levels with a total of 9 years: primary education of 4 years, exclusive of Vietnamese language reading and writing class; lower secondary education of 3 years; and upper secondary education of 2 years.
- Promotion of popular education (elementary, preparatory and complementary levels respectively with 4 months, 4 months and 8 months), vocational education (elementary and secondary levels)

Remarks on First education reform: 1950

- Facilities and textbooks problems
- Lack of qualified teacher and school manager
- Curriculum not appropriate to war context
- Education content in “popular education” and “vocational education” programs and of low quality
- Under development of vocational schools

Second education reform: 1956

- After the Liberation and the Restoration of peace in the North (1954) there was an urgent unification of the two education system
- 1956: a new education reform in the context of economic rehabilitation, building the North and the fight for the reunification of the whole country
- Purpose of education: training and fostering young people to become “people who had all- round development in all aspects, and were good citizens and officials to the Motherland”
- Educational content: more comprehensive (with an emphasis on moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic aspects) with the motto of “linkages between theory and practice, and school and social life”

Second education reform: 1956

- The education content had a comprehensive character and included 4 aspects: ethics, intellectual knowledge, physical culture and aesthetic
- Abolishment of the command education system, began a more equitable relationship between teachers and students, introduction of extra-curricular activities, and gradually of production activities into schools as an important way to shape personalities.
- The 12-year and 9-year general education systems in newly liberated and freedom areas respectively were combined into a 10-year system (primary education: 4 years, lower secondary education: 3 years, and upper secondary education: 3 years). This system was somewhat similar to the USSR's education system.

Third education reform: 1980

- After the great victory of spring 1975, in order to upgrade the education quality in the North and to unify the two education systems (10 years duration in the North and 12 years duration in the South), the Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam decided in 1979 on another education reform
- In 1981-1982 school year, the government started the 3th education reform to put in place a unified national education system that was appropriate to the national construction strategies and development of the country

Third education reform: 1980

- The structure of the education system was revised; the 12-year system in the South and 10-year system in the North were replaced by a new 12-year general education structure, in which primary and lower secondary schools were combined and preparation was made for streaming in upper secondary schools. A number of specialized universities were established and developed.
- The replacement of textbooks at all school levels -the most important task in the third education reform and completed in 1996 - brought consistency to general education across the nation.

Third education reform: 1980

- Educational objectives: the provision of care and education for the younger generation from early childhood to adulthood with the aim of laying the initial foundations for all-round human development; implementing universalization of education to facilitate carrying out three revolutions (of productive relationships, science and technology, and culture and ideology); training and fostering -in line with the requirements of labor division- an increase in the size of the working staff.
- Education content: focus was placed on “Improving the quality of comprehensive education, and producing a new type of worker who were masters and able to shoulder the cause of people’s socialism construction.”
- Educational principles: included learning together with practice, education and work, and the school and society linkages were strengthened.

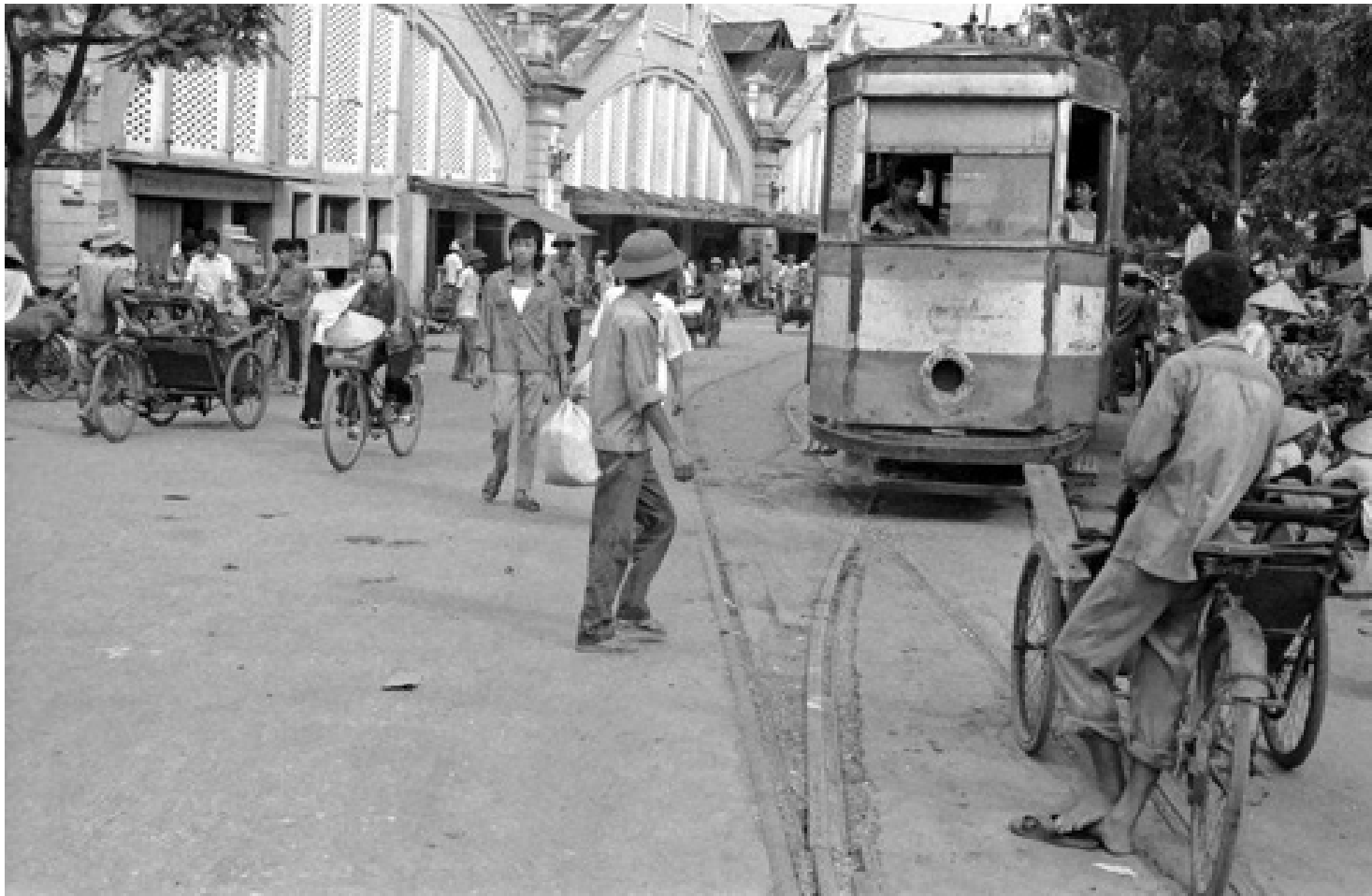
Remarks on the third education reform: 1980

- This reform faced a number of challenges and revealed several limitations during implementation.
- The biggest limitation was the unrealistic, non-feasible, objectives and solutions, e.g. very large expansion of the size of the system, educational subsidies for all, universalization, etc. Meanwhile, there was a lack of adequate resources due to the border war and economic recession.
- The general perception was one where large subsidies and education welfare support were expected by all. But this led to the educational underdevelopment as, having been influenced by such perception, the expenditure for education only accounted for small proportion in the state budget in comparison with other sectors.
- The expectation of subsidies was totally inappropriate in a poor and underdeveloped country like Vietnam, especially in the context of post-war period and economic crisis.

Remarks on the third education reform: 1980

- The biggest challenge faced by Vietnamese education in early 1980s was that the State was not able to provide financial resources while it dismantled the importance of the collective economy.
- Education like other social sectors, faced a serious shortage of resources. Schools had little or no operating funds and finances for teacher salaries were insufficient.
- As a result both teachers and students left schools, and the size of the education system and its quality declined.

Remarks on the third education reform: 1980



Remarks on the third education reform: 1980

- In order to overcome the economic crisis, Vietnamese leaders planned, in 1986, for a major national reform to move from the centralized planning system to socialist-oriented market mechanism.
- The education sector also needed to reform:
 - to change past inappropriate perceptions and solutions
 - to forcefully propose and implement new solutions so as to halt the recession, stabilize and strengthen the system, and bring about a situation with the resources needed for continued development.
- To meet this objective required changes in the areas of socialization, democratization, diversification, and mobilization of social, family and school resources for the younger generation.

Remarks on the third education reform: 1980

- Solutions to 1986 education reform
 - collection of tuition fees at all levels (with the exception of primary education as this sub-sector has a target of universalization);
 - permission was given to open private kindergartens, and semi-public and people-founded classes/schools at all levels.
- establishment of specialized schools at lower and upper secondary levels for gifted students; and selective classes for excellent students in normal/teacher-education lower and upper secondary schools
- pilot work on streaming the upper secondary curriculum was strengthen;
- preparation for streamed curriculum expansion to allow classification of learning activities according to student's abilities and expectations, and to different pathways.

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Remarks on three education reforms

- Data on school and enrolment (MOET, 1998)

Period	Primary school education		Lower secondary school	
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students
1942	737	62,300	65	16,700
1991	7124	8,856,986	3129	2,678,350
1994	10,137	9,040,955	4616	3,101,483
1998	12,058	8,865,305	6321	4,860,709

Remarks on three education reforms

- Achievement
 - on the HDI, Vietnam improved from 122 (out of 174 countries) in 1995 to 109 (out of 175 countries) in 2001
 - For basic education, Vietnam has achieved good outcomes for a long time: the adult illiteracy rate in Vietnam steadily declined from 20% in 1985 to 13.4% in 1990 and 6.3% in 1995, 7.3% in 2000 (Indonesia: 12.7%; China: 14.2%; Philippines: 4.9%; UNDP 2003).

Remarks on three education reforms

- Worrying trends
 - Low all-level-enrolment: in 2001 64% (80% in the Philippines, 64% in Indonesia, 64% in China and 64% in the world, UNDP 2003)
 - enrolment rate at university level in Vietnam did not increase: around 2% between 1980 and 1993 (1% to 4% in China, World Bank 1997)
 - Adult illiteracy: 7.3%

Remarks on three education reforms

- the enrolment rate drops at all levels;
- the gender enrolment disparity at university level is fairly high and has widened in recent years;
- children of high-income families enjoy some advantages over children of lowincome families in secondary and university education

Challenges for the 4th education reform

- Lack of resources for education
- Low efficiency of resource utilization in the education sector
- Weakness of, and constraints on, teaching staff
- Outdated and irrelevant syllabi, textbooks, and teaching and assessment methods
- Inappropriate management and organization in universities for teacher training and educational research institutes
- Shortage of skilled teachers

One essential question

How to renovate the way of thinking, to escape from the so-called traditional ways of thinking and doing things, and especially to avoid a piecemeal management style ?