

VIETNAMESE EDUCATION FROM THE SYSTEMATIC POINT OF VIEW

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The renovation process has enabled Vietnam to achieve a remarkable economic growth. However, this growth is quantitative rather than qualitative. In order to achieve significant changes in quality, the economy should be based on intellect. It is not possible to rely only on cheap labour resources or goods processing type of work. Well developed, advanced education is a requisite factor, which is a foundation of a knowledge economy. Therefore, we are now facing the challenge of preventing the deterioration; and making the education prosper, so its “products” would be able to meet demanding requirements of the period of integration into the world economy.

1. Current state of education. Nowadays, education has become of a significant concern to the society and government. A various number of views have been put forward regarding this issue. Most of people think that, comparing with other countries, education in Vietnam is of a much lower level. However, some people argue that this is not the case, and, indeed, Vietnamese education has many noteworthy achievements. As the proof, they take the success of Vietnamese students at International Olympiads and achievements in the enlargement of education system. So on which basis, can we than make the conclusion whether Vietnamese education system is poor or not? In order to evaluate an education system, two approaches could be used.

- One of the approaches is to establish an index system, on the basis of which investigation and evaluation can be made to draw the conclusion regarding current state of education system. This method has scientific argument, and therefore is very convincing. However, it still involves much controversy. Firstly, no precise index system and certain means of evaluation exist yet. On the other hand, different views and opinions will possibly create various index systems; hence, different conclusions may be conducted.

- Second method is based on publicity and media. This method does not lack scientific characteristics. In fact, this method is a combination of expert analysis and law of large numbers. Individuals’ opinions about education are based on their own experience and understanding. Each person’s subjective view, however, when integrated still generate objective opinion.

Most of views agree on the fact that current state of education is rather worrying. This article will not cover the above topic, as it has already been discussed intensively; but will only outline the issues³, subjectively regarded as the main problems of education system.

- Overladen but inefficient studies (during primary, secondary and high school). Probably, in no other countries, students⁴ have to deal with so much psychological pressure and overload of work as in Vietnam. However, the education system is unable to create high quality “products”. Whereas, in many developed countries, although students study much less, it is still possible to generate high level of labour force and satisfy the demands of the modern economy.

- The backward university education system (comparing with other developing countries in the same region, as well as in the world).

- Reversion of the system of values, spurious diplomas and certificates (not only on the level of PhD)

- Degradation of teaching staff.

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³ Farther the term *issue* will mean faults.

⁴ Farther the term *students* will mean all people studying at any level of education, including school pupil, student and PhD student.

- The sluggish education control system, as well as weakness of educational research.
- Inability to create driving force to motivate teaching staff toward self development.
- Incapability to establish a system, which would enable self improvement, or produce optimum policies. This is probably the most crucial issue, which influences other subjects, has led to much perplexity and inability to find ways to cope with anxiety of society.

2. The systematic model of education. People from education field and dedicated people have put much effort to solve existing problems and bring education to the development orbit. Many suggestions and views, put forward, have a very high value. Among them it is worth mentioning the contribution of processor Hoang Tuy's group, and other domestic scientists or Vietnamese scientists from abroad. This proves that education has become prior anxiety of the society. However, according to our subjective opinion, those efforts mentioned above, has not exactly been originated from overall systematic point of view, from complex dialectic relation, multi-layer; and therefore, it will be difficult to find optimum solution for the educational problem. Indeed, they were based on the following way of thinking:

- Experience based, look at the problem not in integrity, act with principle "Where a fire there we shall extinguish". This is the main cause of difficulties and perplexity for Ministry of Training and Education.

- Straightforward thinking; no effort is put to find the key point, the critical knot of the problem.

- Applying the exact model of other countries, without analyzing the situation and distinctive features of Vietnam in particular. Very common principle is: "if other developed countries do this, we should do it as well".

In order to solve these urgent problems in education, the most important is to find their root causes and conditions that have caused them. Only then, the appropriate solution could be found.

Education is a very complicated system. In order to find the optimum solution for education, careful research as well as decent investment is needed. This article will only provide with a model and the way to approach the problem, which will allow to observe the issues and to determine the relationship between causes and consequences. From this, essential causes could then be found in order to provide solutions for education. In other words, the main objective of this article is limited to the establishment of methodology, which will be a tool to support in studying and finding solution for Vietnamese education.

The model constructed from the components and many-sided relation (interaction) links (see the diagram)

2.1 The components.

- The model consists of 3 layers. External layer include politic, *socio-cultural and economic* systems. Education system is directly affected by both external systems listed above, as well as by *social environment* it is situated in. On another hand, social environment itself is influenced by those 3 external systems.

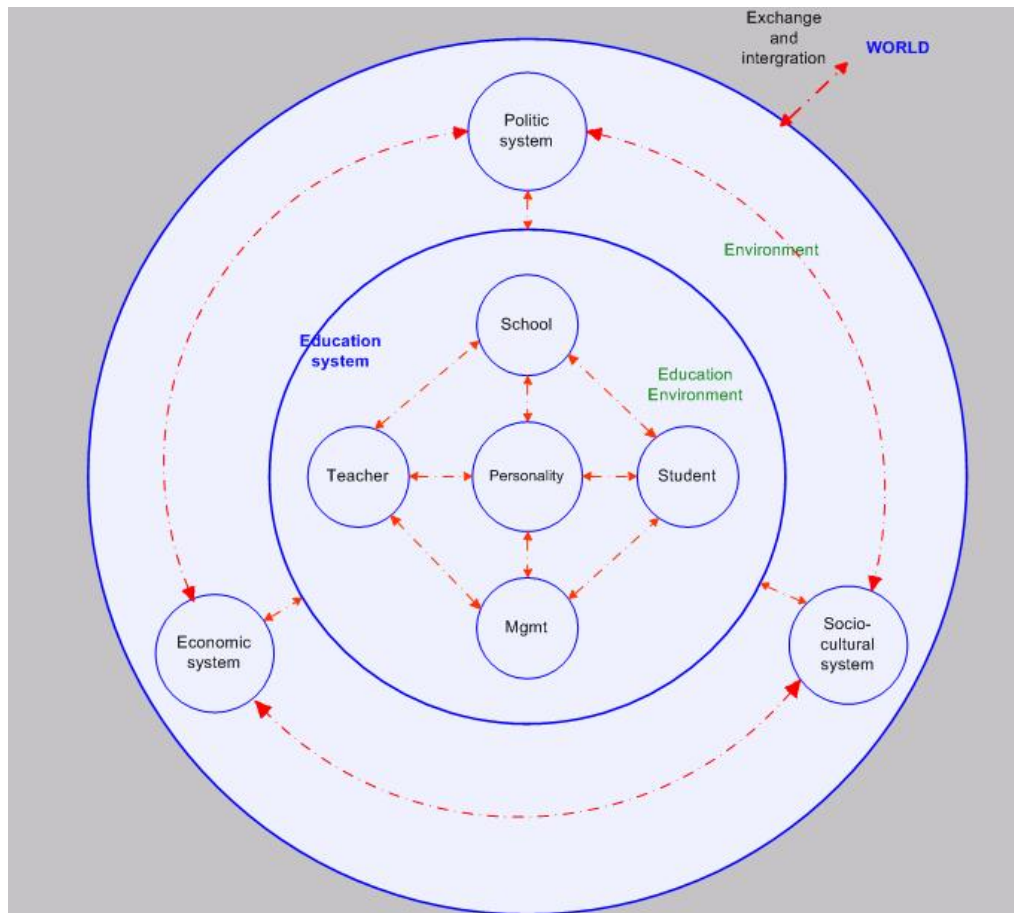
- Education system, in its turn, consists of 4 subsystems: *school⁵-teachers-students-education management*; and is surrounded by *educational environment*.

- Kernel of the education system is a *personality* as a social individual with his own peculiarities.

2.2. Relation and interaction between subsystems.

⁵ School means educational institutions

- In general, all the components, both of the same and of the different layer, all have impacts on each other. This is a multi-sided relationship. However, we will study this interactive relationship with the purpose of understanding the influences on education. Different influences could be categorized into *direct-indirect*, *main-supplementary*, *forward and backward*.



- The influence is *direct* if one component directly affects another component. For example, politic system can influence education system directly, by providing education policies. The *indirect* influence occurs when one component impact another component through intermediary. Series of influences, which can be repeated again, may create the effect on the final component. An example of indirect influence is changes in the economic system, which affect socio-cultural system and consequently social environment, educational environment and finally the components: teacher, students, school and management.

- Influences are divided into *main* and *supplementary*. If main influences lead to significant changes of the component, then the effect of supplementary influence is not so vivid. However, it can still result in unexpected consequences for education. Government education policies will create the main influence, essential for education system. Whereas, the influence of the school on the management system is not clear and is supplementary.

- Influences are also categorized into *forward* and *backward*. Influence is considered to be forward if it is formed from the root subsystems that caused faults, we are interested in. On the other hand, backward influences happen when a system objects to factors that affect it. The phenomena of students choosing common classified universities or a particular career could be explained by forward influence of market on demand of labour force and then on career-guidance of students. Poor quality products offered by schools have a negative impact on the economy and caused staff's old-fashioned knowledge. This is backward influences of the education system on political-economic-social cultural systems.

Since our objective is to analyze the education system, study of factors that effect the education should assist this purpose. Study and identification of necessary solutions may depend on different education systems in particular situations. Main influences that have a great impact on the education system are as following:

- Politics/economy/culture → education.
- Politics/economy/culture → social environment/education environment → education.
- Politics → economy/culture → education.
- Social environment → personality → students and teachers.
- Exchange and integration with the world → politics/ economy/ culture /social environment→ education.
- Exchange and integration with the world → social environment → education
- Personality → teachers/ students.
- Educational management system → school/ teachers/students.
- Etc.

2.3. Position and function of subsystems.

2.3.1. **Politics** is a significant system which is one of three main systems that created the social environment (psychology, social consciousness, regulation, economy, culture etc...). Politics plays a crucial role in establishing “format” and main characteristics of an education system. Apart from its direct influence on the process of setting objectives, positioning, designing an education system model (at schools and universities), educational management system and its subsidiaries, politics also has impact on the economy and the culture, creating a social environment in which the education system is affected. Without exaggeration, politics is a crucial factor that creates the model of the education system. Changes in politics may lead to changes in education (as well as the economy and socio-culture). Vice versa, the development and changes of the education system or the economic and socio-cultural systems may affect politics. Therefore, these interactions are multi-sided and are in a repetitive circle. By studying politics, therefore, representing its typical characteristics make it possible to determine paradigm that politics influence on other components rather than just the education system.

2.3.2. **The economy system.** Structure and model of the economic system is determined by politic system. At the same time, the economy has a great effect on the politics and other components. It influences the social environment and then the education system indirectly. On the other hand, the economic system does directly influence on the education. Economy literally is the investor and customer of the education. Moreover, within the economic environment, there are transactions of purchasing and using ‘education products’. Saying about poor quality of education we mean the fact that graduates are unable to meet the requirements and demands of the economy. There are many examples of direct and indirect influences of the economy on the education. For instance, transforming from the planned economy to market economy has changed social perception (i.e. measurement system of evaluation), relationships between students and teachers. To the Vietnamese, these changes have been recognized noticeably for the last two decades. In the past, knowledge was thought to be the most valuable asset of the society and the government had the responsibility to sponsor the education. Nowadays it is also an asset and a means for an individual to earn his living. Hence, apart from government supports, people have to contribute and spend their own money to pay for education. Knowledge is not a freebie anymore. Mention the past again, teacher used to be well respected and prestige like it is said in a Vietnamese saying: “One word is taught by your teacher, half a word is also taught by your teacher”. However, this isn’t true anymore for the present. Market has changed the relationship between students and teachers. Properly, the relation between teacher and student has changed to the “seller-buyer” relation. It may be likely that such an issue in education will arise due to this change. In a particular economic system, different transactions and targets for education system are created. Changing from planned

to market economy would undoubtedly cause major changes in the education, especially for the period of renovation when the old system is still dominant whilst the new one lacks power.

2.3.3. **Socio-cultural system** is one of the systems that have vital influence on the education. Probably, it is because culture is a soul of the society and the cradle that cultivates the education. It has both direct and indirect (through economy and politics) effect on the education. Two sides should be considered, while talking about culture. One of them is traditional characteristics, which have underwent the test of the time and absorbed deeply into the mind of people as well as the education system. Another side of the culture is new features, which are the results of the development process of the society, and exchange and integration with the world culture. Nowadays, with the strong power of international integration and globalization, especially influenced by appearance of the Internet and advancement of information technology, people are becoming closer and understand each other more. In fact, the Internet culture and types of global culture have emerged. This incredible speed of integration has had a significant impact on the social environment and education. Lack of understanding the importance of this influence, would lead to scientists struggling with unexpected changes.

All 3 external systems, discussed above, create social environment and are mutually connected and influenced by each other. Social environment reflects different aspects of the life of society and influences to education: political environment, moral, psychology of the society, government and social concern regarding education etc. These traits cultivate and directly affect education and the education system.

2.3.4. **School – teachers – students – education management** systems are the components of the education system. The final target of the education is to create useful “products” for the society. Therefore, students should be the central focus of the education. However, the role of teachers, educational institution and education management system are significant for creation of high quality “products”. All these components are linked and influence each other. There can not be a good student without a good teacher. Poor condition of the school environment would undoubtedly affect teachers’ and students’ state of mind. The importance of education management system should also be stressed. All these systems are directly influences by the education system. If education environment is deprived and has signs of degradation, than it would certainly have an adverse impact on teachers, students and education cadres. By contrast, favourable educational environment would be a driving force for the development of the education.

2.3.4. **Personality.** Person always has the central position in any social system. It is impossible to have good education if it is not for the sake of people and based on people. Personality, here, is meant as a social person with analogous culture, characteristics, perception about the world, which is determined by the history, the current state of the society. However, each person is unique. Therefore, if diversification is not created for full development of ones potential, and instead the same method is applied, it will not be possible to achieve the progress.

3. **Application of the model.**

3.1. In order to apply the model to the analysis of particular education system, the following tasks should be carried out:

- Identification of connotation, typical characteristics of each subsystem and defining the factors, which could directly or indirectly affect education;
- Identification of chief influences on education. Detect the cause and effects of these influences.

From the results we can then have a general picture of the system and its influences. This would help to make a forecast of changes in the education.

Usually, problems in education arise from different causes and are the consequences of various influences. In order to find solution to these problems, their root causes should be found. The following tasks could help to find these causes and to solve the problems.

- Identification of the influences (and components) which have led to the problem.
- Analysis of the above process in order to find root causes of the problem, which may be concerned to different components and emerged from different processes.
- Finding the way to overcome the problem.

There is an observation that some problems have crossed the educational area and can not be thoroughly solved by the methods within the field [6]. Therefore, the reason and the solution to the problem should be found in other systems. However, an understanding of the cause and the development process will help education to find the most efficient solution and minimize the negative impact on education.

There another observation that there may be many issues in education, which are caused by the same factors. Therefore, complete analysis of educational problems and their causes, could enable to categorize them into groups and find suitable solutions for improvement of the whole education system.

3.2. *Illustrative example of the main causes identification process.*

In order to find efficient solutions to every educational problem studies, analysis and investment are needed. Hasty conclusion will lead to unfounded solutions. However, this is not the topic of this article. Here we will present the method of using the model to find the solution to a particular problem. But, this will only be an illustrative example.

*Spurious diplomas and certificates*⁶. This is one of the most disturbing problems for education in Vietnam. To identify the cause of this phenomenon we will delve into the processes that have caused it.

Step1. Identify related elements: it is easy to notice that all 4 components of education system are connected to this issue: students “buy diploma”⁷, educational institutions connive and teachers “sell diploma”, helpless education management system has helped this problem to become popular.

Step2. Identify the causes of the each related elements. Causes of this problem outlined as follow:

Causes related with students:

- C1a. Person want to have a diploma in order to find a work or for career growth.
- C2. These spurious certificates are usable and give benefit.
- C3. Society’s psychology: people (including students and teachers) accept this and regard it as a normal situation.
- C4. Education management system is powerless (or connives) in preventing this problem.

Causes related with teachers:

- C1b. Person need for additional income due to low salary, which is not enough for living expenses.
- C3, C4 (see above)

Causes of education institution’s connivence and helplessness of education management system:

- C3*. The influence of society’s psychology and conception on educational institution and education management system.

⁶ It means diplomas and certificates being spread widely, without the guarantee for basic quality. This does not only apply to PhD but also “selling diplomas” through education in open universities, correspondence education and other.

⁷ “Buying and selling diplomas and certificates” also means “buying the grades”

- C5. Inappropriate mechanism of prevention. Education institution model and management system is not suitable for creation of this mechanism.

Step3. Analyse causes, eliminate those that do not have an adverse impact or are impossible to change. As for the rest, systems that have generated them should be identified.

- The causes C1a, C1b are related to materialistic needs of people (personality subsystem) and as it is said in Vietnamese saying “tradition to study to become an official” [5] (socio-cultural system) Firstly these needs are legitimate and understandable. Secondly they are the cultural tradition which have deeply permeated people’s subconscious and therefore, are not easy to change. Moreover, they are not the main factors that have led to the problem of spurious diplomas. The proof is that previously, Vietnamese society was also affected by this tradition but the phenomenon does not exist widespread. Therefore, causes C1a, C1b do not need any further consideration and could be eliminated.

- The cause C2 reflects the principle of “demands create supplies” and was originated from economic and politic systems.
- The cause C4 is determined by C3* and C5. The cause C3* has the same origin as C3. In order to understand C5, the education management system itself should be studied as well as politic system, which has decisive role in establishing the educational institution and management system models.

Step4. Therefore, the sources which created C2, C3 and C5 should be found.

- *The source of C2*

▪ Economic system:

- C6. Inability to create good mechanism for making decisions about recruiting and promoting staff according to the quality of their work, dismissing those that do not do their job. Diplomas, relation and money have the dominant role in achieving the carrier growth, advantage position and privilege, rather than the ability to perform tasks well. This is especially the case in government companies or organizations. With the development and liberalization of the market, the competitiveness has become stronger; therefore the use of labour according to actual ability will gradually become more popular.

▪ Politic system:

- C7. Inability to create strong law environment (built legal system, investigation and execution law) has led to people unbelief in justice and real value.
- C8. Inability to create fair competition in the economy. Excessive favourableness and superiority of government sector to the private. More rights are given to the functional management system, where the benefit of individuals does not exactly depend on success of organization. This is one of the main reasons which have led to C6.

- *The causes of C3*

▪ The cause C3 reflects one of the aspects of the current state of society. It is the unbelief in equality and changes of value measurement in the society. This could have been caused by the following:

- C7
- Transition from planned to the market economy has made people focus more on their ego and their own material benefit. Especially during the shift from one system (in the economy) to another, general perception of the society, value measurement system has undoubtedly undergone many changes and has not stabilized yet. Furthermore, the process of integration, exchange and information technology development has also changed people’s social perception. They became more concern about the private value rather than pure values of the mind. On one hand this processes are inevitable and

impossible to prevent; on another hand, they are not the causes of social degradation. Therefore, they should also be eliminated.

- *The causes of C5*

Creation of the educational institution and management system models, in order to solve this problem is not an easy task. It requires careful studies and thorough solution. This exceeds the bounds of the purpose of this article. However, I will still suggest some solutions, which in my subjective opinion could be helpful.

- Create the system that would enable to inspect the educational institutions efficiency.
- Establish an accurate qualification system and evaluation system that would allow to objectively estimating the quality. This system should be represented by independent assessment organization, which does not depend on Ministry of Training and Education.
- Improve the education system by decentralization, so each educational institution is an independent object, with the freedom to choose its own path and be responsible for itself. They are only obliged to follow the rules of Ministry of Training and Education, undergo the evaluation of an independent assessment organization; and the development and success would only depends on them.

Therefore, in order to solve the problem of spurious diplomas, we should find the solution for its main causes C7, C8 and C5. Looking at the analysis above, it is clear that this is problem of the whole society rather than just the education. It has both objective (C7, C8) and subjective (C5) factors. Understanding of this would enable management to find the direction toward improvement of the education.

4. Some proposals.

It is clear that educational problem is very complicated. For a long time the government and society were tossing about to find the “exit” for education. The questions which were put forward are: how to build an efficient education system? Which model should be used? These are the urgent issues for Vietnamese education, which have been intensively addressed. In our subjective opinion, there are two ways. One of them is so-called “planned approach”, which is based on organizations and people who have the power to plan and create rule that education have to follow. The second strategy is to liberalize the education, similarly to market economy. Superiority of the “market driven” strategy to the “planned” have already been proved on the example of the economy. Why not, try this method on the education? One of the great achievements of humanity is the model of “3 powers should be divided”. In order to have a steady system, it should have the mechanisms that would create the symmetry and balance each other. If the power is not distributed and the mechanisms do not counterpoise, it will be easy to loss the balance. Having the above in mind, education could be restructured as follow:

- Ministry of Training and Education should be a directing organization which has a role to give an orientation. It should have a function of creating regulations (legal system), establishing the system of criterion and standard that given rules are followed. Using this legal system and standards the Ministry (Government) can set the direction for the education.

- Educational institutions should be allowed to have maximum initiative so they could make their own decision, choose their own model and direction.

- Assessment institutions and media should reflect the real situation in educational institutions.

- The government and society should join to support the education financially. This process should be democratic and public.

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