

Chapter 10

Universalization of Primary Education and the “Socialization of Education” Policy in Vietnam

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Summary

Vietnam’s “socialization of education” policy is focused upon. It takes a role of raising educational resources from communities. The measures are not limited to the monetary aspect. Various resources are to be mobilized and raised through the popular organizations whose active role in the social and political life is characteristic of the socialist system.

The author describes two types of “socialization of education” activities: the inhabitant participating type and the enterprise participating type. In the former, the School Encouragement Association, a local consortium for educational promotion, organizes the popular organizations and representatives of the enterprises in the locality. Many popular organizations support education development. For example, the Women’s Union promotes enrolment of children in schools, donations for school construction and support for poor children, and opening charity courses for non-formal education for women. In the second type, enterprises cooperate financially to construct schools. They also contribute to training students, thus, preparing them as productive workers and offering them employment in the future. Labor unions also participate in school construction, collection of donations for subsidies to children from poor families or the areas with difficulties in going to school. The author points out the contradictory situation in that the implementation of the policy brings about an increase of parents’ and communities’ financial burden and an enlargement of disparities among communities while EFA (Education For All) preaches non-fee education. He also notes problems of local financial ability and sustainability of popular organizations’ activities: many poor areas have difficulty in raising funds because they do not have enough educational resources to carry out “socialization of education” to begin with; it is probable, in the social changes which the country undergoes, to decrease the mobilization capability of the popular organizations by reducing influences of the socialist ideology and increasing members’ work hours.

Key words

Vietnam, primary education

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1. Introduction

In 2001, the Vietnamese government published its “Educational Development Strategy 2010” that showed its vision for a strategic plan to improve the net enrollment rate of primary school from 95% in 2001 to 99% in 2010. This is a typical challenge when tackling the most difficult stage in the universalization of primary education, which is the so-called “last 5% issue”. Because each pupil in “the last 5%” has his/her own difficulty, it is necessary to implement a suitable solution for each of them. For this, the role of various social agents, such as mass organizations, community groups, NGOs and private companies are very important, because the government alone cannot meet these varying needs of education. The Vietnamese government promotes active participation by various social agents and partnerships with/among them.

This article will discuss the role of society in the universalization of primary education focusing on the “Socialization of Education” (in Vietnamese, Xa Hoi Hoa) policy (SEP) in Vietnam.

In the educational development process, as a socialist country, the role of government has of course been critical, but at the same time, participation by non-state “social” agents, such as mass organizations, community groups, NGOs and private companies has been greatly encouraged. In this sense, SEP is the engagement of the entire society in the universalization of education, i.e. the Education by All (EBA) policy or Education for All (EFA) under the Vietnamese socialist regime. This article examines the mechanism of the universalization of education through the participation of all social agents under SEP, by using the theory of social capital.

2. Background of the “Socialization of Education” Policy

2.1. Economic Background of SEP

First of all, why does the Vietnamese government strongly promote SEP? Since 1986, the year the Open Economy Policy (in Vietnamese Doi Moi) was established, the country has enjoyed high performance in economic development. It requires well-trained human resource development for its industrial economy. The needs of well-qualified labor supply have promoted universalization and full day schooling in

primary education. Nghiem Dinh Vy¹ (2004) discussed that “educational socialization is not a temporary solution on account of limited state budget but it is long-term strategy throughout the process of educational development(included of our nation becoming an industrial on with gross national production many times higher than present GNP)”.

Then, in the 9th congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the strategic line of SEP was strongly reinforced;

The Government gives appropriate priorities to boost the development of socialization of education and training. Effective mobilization and exploitation of resources for education and training. Stepping up international cooperation in development and training.

2.2. Fiscal background of SEP

Another factor in behind SEP is the fiscal and financial matter. Although the Vietnamese economy enjoys about 7% growth, and tax income is increasing, the financial resources available for the universalization of primary education are not enough. Like other centrally planned economies of socialist countries, 63 provinces in Vietnam do not have their own income resources. The central government distributes budgets to provinces based on criteria it sets every year.

In the case of primary education, the salary of teachers is provided by the central government because they are civil servants of the state. In spite of this, sometime local communities must employ teachers temporarily using their own money, because the number of civil servants, including teachers, depends on the tax income. That means that if the central government has a shortage of income resources, it is difficult to employ enough teachers to meet the actual needs of primary schools.

On the other hand, investment in the educational infrastructure such as school construction and maintenance is basically provided by the budget of the central government. In reality, the amount available for educational infrastructure investment is too small to meet the existing needs. As a result, the people themselves must pay for the construction and maintenance costs of the school at the community level.

In short, Vietnamese primary education is, in reality, not free of charge, and people must pay for it although it is compulsory. In 2003, the government started a “Revenue Raising Unit (RRU)” system. It officially prescribes that public institutions, such as schools and hospitals can raise funds by themselves. This RRU system dose not only

¹ Deputy Standing Head of the Central Science and Education Committee.

require the financial contribution of citizens but also enhances the ownership rights of people through their engagement in school activities.

3. “Socialization of Education” Policy and Social Capital

3.1. What is Social Capital?

As examined already, in order to meet the economic and fiscal needs, the Vietnamese government promotes SEP for educational development. Under the policy, all social agents are expected to participate in educational activities. In order to understand SEP, it is also important to analyze the social background of why this policy is applicable in Vietnam. Without the participation of social agents, the policy could not be implemented. In order to analyze the social background of SEP in Vietnam, this article uses the theory of social capital. The author assumes that Vietnam has its own unique form to promote SEP under its socialist regime.

In general, the concept of social capital refers to the norms and social relations embedded in the social structures of societies that enable people to coordinate action to achieve desired goals.

In the first place, why would the concept of social capital become highlighted in the field of development? Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable. It is the “missing link” of development (Grootaert 1998).

It is no doubt that the accumulation of capital is the key to development and growth. In traditional economics, the three elements of production are land, capital and labor. In terms of capital, traditionally, it refers to the three types of capital: natural capital, physical capital and human capital. Natural capital refers to land, raw materials and energy resources. Physical capital refers to such things as factories, machines and transportation. Finally, human capital refers to labor power and human power for production. However, it is now recognized that these three types of capital determine only partially the process of development and economic growth, because the way in which the economic and social agents interact and organize themselves to generate growth and development is overlooked. Social capital is the institution, network and environment that enhance the benefits of investments in natural, physical and human capital.

Now, what is the social capital and how can it be defined? In general, social capital

can be defined as “trust norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993).

World Bank (1998) said that social capital “is also the glue that holds them together. It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust, and a common sense of “civic” responsibility that makes society more than a collection of individuals. Without a degree of common identification with forms of governance, cultural norms, and social rules, it is difficult to imagine a functioning society”.

World Bank (1998) also emphasizes the importance of participation and states that social capital is the institutional basis of participation. The depth and intensity of popular collective activity obviously differ by social and institutional setting. One explanation for these differences lies in differing endowments of social capital, the informal rules, norms, and long-term relationships that facilitate coordinated action and enable people to undertake cooperative ventures for mutual advantage.

The Social capital of a society includes the institutions, relationships, attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development.

3.2. Social Capital and Development

How can social capital positively affect development? Grootaert (1998) discusses three major points as follows. It is an argument regarding economic topics, but it could suggest the affects of social capital on community development.

Firstly, social capital promotes information sharing. Decisions by economic agents (or stakeholders) are inefficient because they lack adequate or accurate information. Social capital may create mutual knowledge and reduce uncertainty.

Secondly, social capital enhances coordination of activities. Uncoordinated or opportunistic behavior by agents can also lead to market (or project) failure. This can occur as a result of imperfect information but also simply because the benefits of not complying with an agreement or an expected line of behavior (a “norm”) are greater than the expected penalty.

Thirdly, collective decision-making is a necessary condition for the provision of public service. Usually the government takes responsibility for this. However, just as not all government decisions are in the best interests of their constituencies, local and voluntary associations do not always maximize their utility. The extent to which they do depends not only on how well they address the problems of information-sharing but also

on the degree of equity that prevails. Local institutions are more effective at enforcing common agreements for cooperative action when the assets are distributed relatively equitably and benefits shared equally. Sharing in equity provides an incentive for improved coordination in the management of local public goods, increasing productivity for everyone effectively.

3.3. Social Capital of Socialist Regime in Vietnam: Complex Socialist Social Capital

In Vietnam, why do social agents participate in educational development? What is the social capital to promote their engagement in SEP? The author found that in terms of social capital, the ideology of socialism itself is the major norm and various networks of socialist mass organizations and other forms of organizations are the major institutions of social capital. In short, the socialist regime itself is the social capital in Vietnam.

In Vietnam, Study Encouragement Association (SEA) is the most important social network to implement the SEP. SEA is a sort of consortium of the society to promote education consisting of various social agents such as the Department of Education and Training (DOET), mass organizations and companies. It aims to encourage the study of pupils and students in the area through the promotion of schooling, mass propaganda, support of school construction and maintenance, and providing scholarships. SEA is organized in all levels of educational administration, i.e. schools, communities, districts, provinces and on the national level.

In addition to SEA, there are various kinds of mass organizations that promote participation in social activities. A mass organization here is a non-governmental and not-for-profit organization but that is nevertheless guided by the communist party. Its main role in society is to promote the penetration of the communist party's policy into all levels of society. For educational development, the role of mass organizations is very important.

Article 9 of the Vietnamese constitution defines the role of mass organizations in society. It said that;

The Vietnam Fatherland Front, which comprise the various political parties, the Vietnam Confederation of Trade Unions, the Vietnam Association of Collective Peasants, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the Vietnam Women's Union, and other member organizations, is a firm prop of the State.

In particular, for educational development, the role of Ho Chi Minh Youth Union is

clearly defined in article 41. It said that “The Ho Chi Minh Youth Union, the family and society, together with the school, have the responsibility to educate youth and children.”

These socialist mass organizations have close relations with each other. This social network binds people and social agents as well as forms the social infrastructure of collective action based on this socialist network, i.e. socialist social capital. To implement SEP, it promotes various social activities for education both financially and spiritually such as donations, schooling campaigns and propaganda.

The case of Nha Trang primary school in Thai Nguyen province provides a good example of socialist social capital². Except for the schoolmaster, all of the teachers are women, and they are members of the Women’s Union. The union has various activities for education, such as scholarships for the poor, supplements for the salary of female teachers and other fund raising for school management.

Interestingly, the teachers are not only members of the women’s union but also of other mass organizations such as the Trade Union, Farmer’s Union and Fatherland Front. In their case, each teacher joins 5-6 organizations. This is not only the case of teachers but also of the other members of society. Under the socialist regime, people join various mass organizations. It makes the social network close and promotes social collective action. This “Complex Socialist Social Capital (CSSC)” is fundamental to make all society participate in educational development under SEP in Vietnam.

4. Practices of “Socialization of Education” Policy

4.1. Two types of SEP: “Inhabitant Participating” and “Enterprise Participating” Types

According to the author’s field research in Vietnam, the implementation of SEP can be classified into the following two types: the first one is “Inhabitant Participating” Type and the second is “Enterprise Participating” Types.

The “Inhabitant Participating” Type has the characteristic that parents and people in the community participate in primary school activities such as fund raising for school construction and maintenance through mass organizations and community groups.

The “Enterprise Participating” Types has the characteristic that local private and/or state companies donate educational investment costs voluntarily and/or under the

² Interview by the author with Nguyen Thi Dung, the principal, on 24 March 2004 at the school

initiatives of School Encouragement Association.

In addition, there are various combinations of those two major types. The following two case studies in Ha Nam province show how the various social agents engage in the educational development and how the socialist norms and networks, i.e. CSSC promote the collective action of those stakeholders.

4.2. Case of “Inhabitant Participating” Type

First, a case of “People’s Participatory-type” will be examined. An Vietnamese academician, Vu Tuyen Hoang³ (2004) discussed “Socialization of education and training has been contributed by the people to implementation and contribution of wealth, property that bring great, diverse contents, both profound and concrete”.

In Ha Nam province, the role of mass organizations, especially the Women’s Union is quite significant for SEP⁴. The Women’s Union in Ha Nam supports educational development consisting of both “hard” and “soft” components. Its main activities are as follows:

- 1) Education for women (in particular mothers) to understand the importance of children’s schooling
- 2) Fundraising to gather contributions for school construction
- 3) Fundraising for the poor children’s schooling
- 4) Charity school

Among them, the charity school is quite a unique trial of non-formal education (NFE) by the Women’s Union and people themselves. It provides educational opportunities to poor children who have difficulty with schooling. Although it is NFE, its curriculum and examination follows the official standard of the Department of Education and Training (DOET).

For example, in Phu Ly commune of Ha Nam province, the Women’s Union started a charity school three years ago that has provided educational opportunities without fee to 36 poor children and people both in the primary and lower secondary level. This school accommodates not only children but also adults who did not receive education because of poverty. The charity school has a linkage with formal education. Because it follows the official curriculum, some students temporarily study there during hard times. After

³ Chairperson of the Central Council Presidium, Vietnam Union of Science and Technology Association (VUSTA)

⁴ Interviewed by the author on 9 December 2004 at the office of Women’s Union, Ha Nam province.

finishing the NFE, they go back to formal education.

There are two types of charity school in terms of management. The first is the “commune type” charity school. The Women’s Union, other social agents and people in the commune participate in its management. People provide financial support and the commune center is provided as its classroom. The second is the “school affiliated” type charity school. This is a kind of nursery school for pupils financed by the government. In both types, teachers are mainly volunteers retired from primary school, but some of them are in service.

As the result of the active involvement of the Women’s Union of Ha Nam Province, the charity schools in the province have 180 children in 30 classes.

4.3. Case of “Enterprise Participating” Type

Next, the type of “privatization type” will be discussed. The mechanism of this SEP is: at first, the DOET in the province and the Board of Education and Training (BOET) in the commune plan education investment. Based on the plan, SEA facilitates matching of school needs and community and the contribution of companies. Then the company invests in educational development.

In Ha Nam province, But Son Cement Company is a key industry⁵. It has a close relationship to the government and supports SEP. The company started school construction projects in mountainous area of the province in 1990. The company also supports the “software” component of education such as providing internship opportunities, scholarships for the physically disabled and poor and providing awards to good students.

In Vietnam, the Trade Union is one of the important mass organizations. The Trade Union of But Son Cement Company also plays a crucial role in SEP. The financial resources for philanthropy by the company come from workers’ donations through the trade union as well as from the benefits of the company itself. Each worker donates a day’s salary each month for the charity fund that will be donated to supporting school transportation, awards for good students and summer camp. To create a close partnership with the school, the members of the trade union visit teachers and exchange their ideas for further support.

As discussed above, the company and trade union engage in SEP as members of

⁵ Interviewed by the author with Bui Van Tran, the director of But Son Cement Company on 10 December 2004 at the office of the company

society.

5. “Socialization of Education” Policy and the Problems It Faces

5.1. SEP and Education Rights

As discussed, SEP is a key policy for the universalization of education in Vietnam. It is challenging the policy of “Education By All (EBA)” for “Education for All (EFA)”, as well facing several problems as follows.

The World Education Forum, 2000, Dakar set the goal of “free” and “qualified” education. Also, the Vietnamese strategy to shift to full day schooling aims to improve the quality of education. On the other hand, SEP makes parents of pupils and the community bear education costs. This is not suitable for the idea of “free” education.

In reality, without SEP, Vietnam can neither introduce full day schooling nor universalize education. SEP also has aspects of promoting participation and ownership rights of the people and community.

5.2. Local Financing and Regional Gap

Promotion of SEP could widen the regional gap of education standards. Some areas that have economic power and strong participation by residents could enforce SEP to achieve full day schooling and other educational improvements, while others that are poor and have less participation cannot expect educational improvements. As a result, the gap of educational standards could widen among provinces, districts and communes even in the same province.

The parents’ consciousness of education is also an important factor. In general, the comparatively rich parents in the city prefer full day schooling, while the comparatively poor do not. For them, children are important sources of labor power.

Some provinces and districts try to solve these regional gaps through their own efforts. It is necessary to set up a system for adjustments to solve these regional gaps on a nationwide basis.

5.3. Exemption and Full-day Schooling

Under SEP, in reality the school collects money for its educational investments from the parents in the name of school construction and other fees. These fees are in reality compulsory. For the poor family who cannot afford them, the school has an exemption

system. Here lies a serious dilemma. The poorer area has more poor families that have received exemption. That means that schools in the poor area which need more investment for education cannot expect funds from parents and the community.

6. Conclusion

As this article discussed, the universalization of primary education in Vietnam is facing the critical issues of the so-called “last 5% problem” and improvement of quality through full day schooling. In order to solve these issues, Vietnam has a unique policy, SEP, under the socialist regime. The social basis of SEP in Vietnam is CSSC. In particular, the role of mass organizations is important. The socialist mass organizations support SEP both financially and ideologically. CSSC promotes the participation of all social agents in education, i.e. Education for all (EFA) through Education by All (EBA). This challenge of SEP in Vietnam can be a good practice for other countries that face the issue of universalization of education, in particular in terms of social mobilization and participation in education.

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