

Reform in the Higher Education for Sustainable Development and International Integration

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The Vietnamese education system is much below the international standard. The quality of education and performance failed to meet the market demand. To integrate into the world community, Vietnam has to reform its education service by accepting international standards and learning from foreign systems of education, especially the American one.

1. Existing education system in Vietnam

At present, there are the following groups of universities and colleges in Vietnam;

a. Public schools: in this group, there are community colleges, 4-year universities, national universities, foreign language universities and a national institute of politics.

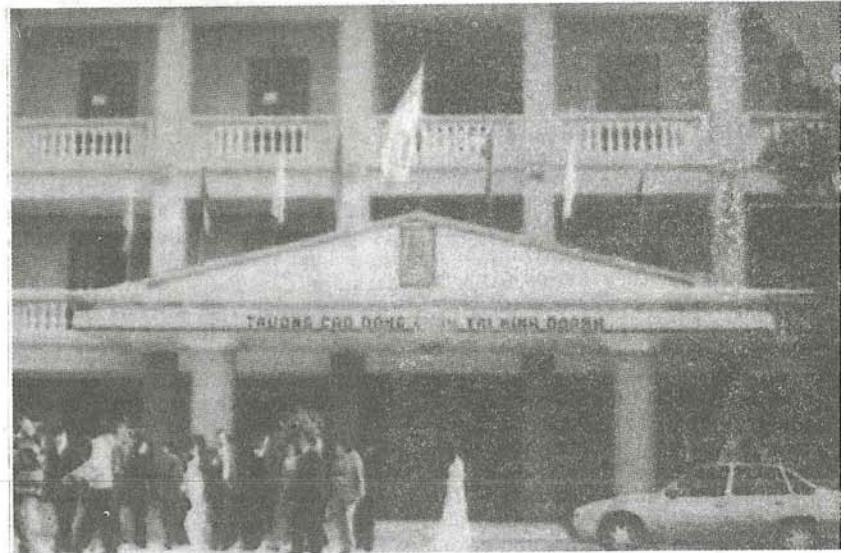
b. Private schools: there are private schools run by either nationals or foreigners (such as Australian RMIT), universities with cooperation with foreign partner (such as Australian Victoria University), and training centers (such as American-Vietnamese Training Center) and many foreign language centers.

Defects in the current system include the lack of 2-year community universities, training programs divided into credits (which cost students a lot of time and money), links between schools, and effective entrance examination. To deal with these defects, we must reform the higher education. How can we reform it to make it suitable to efforts to develop the economy and integrate into the world market?

2. New model of the education system

To build a higher education system that could give continuous education and avoid either shortage or surplus of graduates in certain fields, we should develop the following five groups of schools:

a. Public schools:



- Two-year community colleges (like their American counterparts) situated in provinces with great potentials (like ones in An Giang and Tiền Giang now) provide credit-based training at associate degree in two programs:

(1) Two-year career program: this program aims at training technician and experts in various fields (computing, accounting, tourism, hotel management, cooking, sea-farming, sea product processing, food processing, handicraft, clothing, food hygiene, physiatrics, etc.

(2) Transfer program: this program includes all sciences needed for entering 4-year universities.

Two-year community colleges help students reduce cost for their first two years of schooling and prevent them from concentrating in big cities. These colleges could be supported by local authorities, communities or companies.

- Four-year regional colleges, or regional colleges for short: They equal four-year state college in the U.S., and are situated in vital economic zones (Mekong Delta, Western

Highlands, Hồi Delta, Northwest, etc. They give training at bachelor degree in various fields (business management, economics, finance, banking, foreign trade, journalism, music, drama, fine arts, construction, architecture, foreign language, humanities, law, etc.) needed for local economic development.

- National universities: They are equal to graduate universities in the U.S. and situated in big cities, such as Hà Nội, HCMC and Đà Nẵng. They give 5-year training programs in medicine, information technology, computing, mining, civil engineering, civil aviation, geology, metallurgy, petrochemicals, nuclear power, geophysics, etc.

- High-tech institutes: They are equal to Postgraduate schools in the U.S. where graduates from national universities could make studies for their master or doctor degrees. They are schools where the best experts are trained with help from foreign professors.

However, we need not only technical experts but also national lead-

ers, so we should develop the fifth institute.

- Hồ Chí Minh Academy: It is a particular model for the socialist regime in Vietnam, besides the National Institute of Politics. This Academy is specialized in training future political leaders in expertise needed for their leadership (leadership skills, diplomatic practices, foreign language, international laws, etc.) As PM Phan Văn Khải put is, Vietnam has wasted a lot of natural and human resources because of impotent leaders, which caused damage to the environment and the people's confidence in the government as well. It isn't their fault when impotent officials failed to fulfil their tasks, but it due to the fact that the Government has no program and school to train potent leaders for the future while the existing National Institute of Politics doesn't undertake this task.

Of 100 graduates from universities, there are only several ones who have leadership skills and want to become political leaders. Various tests could be carried out to discover and select these students for the Academy. The teaching staff of the Academy must include the best experts in every field, and we must secure help from foreign organization and governments if need be. If there is no school to train such leaders, Vietnam will keep suffering loss of talented persons and natural resources, and a near leadership crisis seems inevitable.

b. Private schools: The existing system of private schools could be

maintained. It's necessary to develop more private universities that have cooperation relations with foreign universities and limit the number of foreign universities in Vietnam. Teaching staff and degrees provided by these schools must be standardized.

3. Problems to solve

Besides reforming the system of universities, the education authorities must pay full attention to the following problems

a. Autonomy: The Ministry of Education and Training must give full autonomy to both public and private schools. They must have rights to make decisions relating to their business, from the number of students they admit, what they teach, the topic they test the student, or the number of degrees given every year. The Ministry need only stipulate what they mustn't teach at schools. Like companies that are regulated by the Companies Law, universities could do and teach anything not prohibited by laws.

b. Credit system: This system must be applied to all universities.

c. Foreign language as a compulsory subject: Some subjects must be taught in two languages – Vietnamese and a foreign one – such as business management, foreign trade, banking, information technology, tourism, international commercial law, etc.

d. No age limit: Universities, especially the community ones, must admit students of all ages without limit.

e. Facilities and campuses: Each university must have a campus of five hectares at least where all facilities needed for intellectual studies and physical training must be available (laboratory, stadium, gymnasium, etc.)

f. Education line: Universities must provide students with moral, physical and mental education. If we fail to give them the moral education, the society will pay the penalty for it because of wicked experts or laborers. The damage will even greater if such graduates are assigned important tasks and positions. In addition, the physical education is also very necessary.

g. Education board: There must be an education board in each university that is totally independent from the governing body and teaching staff. The board could include the following members:

- Chairperson: a representative from teaching, research or business circles.

- First vice-chairperson: a representative from local authorities.

- Second vice-chairperson: a representative from the university governing body.

- Three or four members who are representatives from the local press, writers or business circle.

- A cashier assigned by the board.

The board undertakes the task of estimating the performance of the university, suggesting necessary adjustments and mobilizing financial support for the university. ■

