



The Development of Vietnam's Educational Philosophy in History

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. Vietnamese educational philosophy has evolved through four distinct stages: pre-colonial, colonial, post-independence, and modern. Originating from Confucianism's emphasis on ethics and social responsibility, education shifted to practice under French colonialism, to socialism after 1945, and to modernization after Doi Moi (1986). Doi Moi transformed Vietnam from a planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy, resolving the crisis of the 1980s. The study utilizes historical and academic documents to analyze the interplay between individual and collective development in response to globalization. The results emphasize the importance of moral education, practical transformation, and adaptation to a pluralistic context, proposing modern policies to reduce inequality, promote modernization and sustainable development, and enrich Vietnam's educational heritage.

Research Methodology. The study analyzes historical texts to examine Vietnamese educational philosophy across four distinct periods: pre-colonial (before 1858), colonial (1858-1945), post-independence (1945-1975), and modern (1975-present). Qualitative interpretation methods from original documents such as the Four Books, colonial decrees, works of President Ho Chi Minh, the 2013 Education Law, and assessments from scholars such as Tran Trong Kim (cultural studies) and Pham Minh Hac (educational reform). Data from the National Library of Vietnam and UNESCO are thematically coded (reason, morality, community), time-mapped, context-compared, and cross-checked to ensure reliability, with a focus on reason and moral responsibility in a pluralistic context, thereby facilitating an understanding of the development and social impact of education.

Research Results. Vietnamese educational philosophy has gone through four stages. Before colonialism, Confucianism emphasized morality and community responsibility, training officials through examinations. During the colonial period (1858-1945), vocational training replaced French education, causing resistance from Phan Boi Chau (a patriot who combined Vietnamese and Western values). After independence (1945-1975), Ho Chi Minh's ideology combined morality and practice, popularizing writing and national defense. In the modern period (1975-present), Doi Moi (1986) promoted STEM education and global integration, while maintaining a focus on moral education. The results showed a shift from morality to practice, followed by collectivism and modernity, as societies adapted to Confucianism, colonialism, socialism, and globalization, striking a balance between individual and community interests.

Conclusions. The study traces the philosophy of Vietnamese education through four stages, from Confucianism and socialism to modern globalization, balancing individual development and collective responsibility, cultural adaptation, and global pressure. This philosophy transcends Western individualism, prioritizing community harmony and providing practical solutions to address issues of inequality, educational reform, and environmental sustainability. The spirit of solidarity in Vietnam aligns with this philosophy, suggesting potential public policy applications, but needs to be defined flexibly in a pluralistic society. The study analyzes history and orients modern education, proposing comparisons of East Asian philosophies or roles in global climate and human rights policies, affirming that reason and morality are the keys to the future.

KEYWORDS

Vietnam, educational philosophy, Confucianism, socialism, moral education, modernization, global integration

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INTRODUCTION

Education has long played a central role in Vietnam's development, reflecting profound cultural, political, and social changes through historical periods. From the pre-colonial Confucian philosophy, which emphasized ethics and social order, to the pragmatic model under French colonialism, the post-independence socialist ideal, and global integration, Vietnam's educational philosophy has undergone significant changes. This process is a linear development and a complex intersection of tradition and innovation, demonstrating Vietnam's adaptability to internal and external impacts. Understanding this development not only sheds light on the nation's educational heritage but also provides important lessons for addressing modern challenges, such as globalization, technological advancements, social inequality, and climate change [1].

During the pre-colonial period, before the French colonial invasion in 1858, Vietnamese education was profoundly influenced by Confucianism, which was introduced from China around the 10th century under the Ly dynasty [2, p. 44]. Confucian philosophy emphasizes self-cultivation, qi family (family management), governance (governing the country), and peace of the world (stabilizing the globe), considering education as a tool to train moral people to serve the community and the country [3]. Classic texts, such as the Four Books and the Five Classics, form the foundation of the curriculum, which is taught through memorization, moral analysis, and literary composition [4]. The elective system, which originated in the 11th century, evaluated candidates for Confucian ethics and management skills, thereby reinforcing the role of education in maintaining the feudal social order [5]. The village schools and Quoc Tu Giam (Vietnam's first university, established in 1070 during King Ly Thanh Tong's reign) are centers for disseminating this philosophy, linking education with agricultural life and Vietnamese culture [6, p. 34]. However, this system is elitist, mainly catering to the, and has limited access to farmers and women [7].

The arrival of French colonialism in 1858 marked a significant turning point in Vietnam's educational philosophy. The colonial government introduced the Western education model through French-Vietnamese schools, replacing Chinese characters with French and national characters, and shifting from moral education to practical training to serve the ruling apparatus [8]. The Education Ordinance of 1917 prioritized subjects such as accounting, engineering, and management, gradually eliminating traditional Confucian values [9]. This change weakened the Confucian schools, with the last entrance exam in 1919 [10]. However, this period also aroused intellectual resistance. Patriots such as Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) called for a modern education, combining Western science with Vietnamese values to promote national consciousness. After gaining independence in 1945, Vietnam, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) shifted to a socialist educational philosophy, combining moral education with practical skills to build a unified and modern nation [13]. Ho Chi Minh emphasized that education must "make our nation a wise nation" [14]. Illiteracy campaigns, such as the 1945-1950 campaign, taught the national language to millions of people, education focused on science, agriculture, and military skills to support national defense and reconstruction [16]. This philosophy integrates Confucian values, such as patriotism, with Marxist-Leninist ideals of common welfare, creating a traditional and revolutionary educational model [17]. However, war and lack of resources limited the scope of implementation [18].

Following the reunification in 1975, the Doi Moi policy (1986) ushered in a new era, combining socialist ideals with market-oriented reforms [19]. The Doi Moi is the name given to the economic reforms initiated in Vietnam in 1986 to create a "socialist-oriented market economy".

The 1991 Education Law emphasizes "human resource development" for industrialization, introducing STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and foreign language subjects to meet global needs [20]. Moral education is still maintained through civic education, but international integration also introduces Western values, such as critical thinking and creativity [21]. The 2013 Education Law emphasizes "comprehensive development" in parallel with protecting national identity, reflecting a hybrid philosophy [22]. However, the educational disparity between urban and rural areas remains a significant challenge [23]. Environmental education has also emerged as a response to climate change since the early 21st century, although its implementation has been uneven [24].

This study raises a central question: How has Vietnam's educational philosophy evolved through historical periods, and what lessons can be drawn for modern social life? The goal is to map this development process, identifying the main influences of Confucianism, colonialism, socialism, and

globalization, and their impact on educational goals and practices. Unlike Western models such as John Locke's (1632-1704) (prioritizing individual freedom) or Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) (focusing on short-term interests), Vietnamese philosophy always emphasizes community harmony, adapting to external pressures while retaining core values [25; 26]. This resilience is essential in the context of globalization, where education must address issues of inequality, sustainability, and cultural identity [27].

The significance of the study lies in its ability to guide modern education policy. Vietnam's history of synthesizing diverse influences provides a model of balance between tradition and progress, a lesson for developing countries [28]. An ethical focus can minimize ethical fragmentation in a technological society, while adaptability suggests how to integrate global competencies [29]. The study analyzes historical texts, based on sources such as Confucian classics, colonial decrees, Ho Chi Minh's writings, modern policy, and more than 50 secondary academic documents. The article is organized into sections: literature review, research methods, results, discussion, and conclusion, to provide a comprehensive understanding of Vietnam's educational philosophy and its value today.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vietnam's educational philosophy has attracted significant interest from researchers, reflecting its richness and complexity across historical periods. Early studies focused on the pre-colonial period, during which Confucianism provided the foundation for educational thought. A Vietnamese scholar and politician, Tran Trong Kim (1883-1953), in his *History of Vietnam*, emphasizes that Confucian principles, moral cultivation, social order, and wisdom have shaped a system for training officials (scholars) [31]. Classic masterpieces, such as the Four Books and the Five Classics, form the core of the curriculum, taught through memorization and moral analysis, with a focus on cultivating personal qualities that serve the nation [32]. Nguyen Van Huyen (1905-1975) noted that this philosophy, although elitist, has been adopted in village education, fostering a sense of community responsibility [33]. Compared to China's rigid Confucian system, the Vietnamese model is more flexible, integrating local values such as solidarity and patriotism [34]. However, Pham Minh Hac noted that this system lacked practicality, primarily serving the elite, and overlooked the needs of farmers [35].

During the colonial (1858-1945) and imperialist (1945-1975) periods, Vietnam's educational philosophy experienced profound transformations under foreign domination. Under French colonial rule, the traditional Confucian model was systematically dismantled, grounded in moral cultivation and civil service examination. As Nguyen Thuy Anh [36] observes, the French introduced a pragmatic curriculum to train clerks and technicians serving the colonial bureaucracy. The 1917 Education Ordinance institutionalized this approach, emphasizing technical subjects like accounting and engineering while marginalizing traditional moral education and literature [37]. Although the adoption of quốc ngữ and French expanded literacy, it simultaneously disrupted Confucian moral foundations and alienated education from indigenous cultural roots [38]. According to Le in the period (1923-2025) [39], this model accelerates social stratification by privileging urban elites and allowing Confucian schools in rural areas to fade.

Vietnamese intellectuals mobilized education as a platform for cultural and national resistance. Do [11] documents how intellectuals between 1900 and 1939 viewed education and literature as tools for cultural renewal and the construction of anti-colonial identity. Phan Bội Châu's Đông Du movement [40] exemplified efforts to combine Western scientific knowledge with national values, while Pham [41] framed this as a broader assertion of epistemic independence. These dynamics echo Alfred and Corntassel's [12] theory of indigenous resurgence as a response to colonial erasure.

The imperialist period, particularly during the Vietnam War, marked a continuation of educational manipulation. Pham [15] analyzes how the United States used education in South Vietnam (southern Vietnam, as defined administratively by the 1954 Geneva Accords, covering areas south of the 17th parallel) as a psychological weapon to promote anti-communist ideology and undermine revolutionary consciousness. In contrast, Bello [13] highlights how education in North Vietnam, under Ho Chi Minh's leadership, embraced Marxist-Leninist principles and national liberation, serving as a transformative counter-model. Revolutionary education in the North aimed to eliminate colonial remnants and rebuild education on the foundations of ideological clarity and cultural relevance. As Le [14] later notes, this legacy continued into the post-1975 unified Vietnam, where education reform

became a national priority. The transition toward learner autonomy reflected a broader effort to modernize education while retaining national identity.

Each historical phase embodied distinct educational philosophies. Colonial education focused on utility and control, lacking moral coherence and cultural relevance. While ideologically driven, Revolutionary education re-centered the nation and ethics as core principles. However, both phases revealed gaps: insufficient attention to learner agency, individualized pedagogy, and global competencies. Therefore, Vietnam's postwar educational transformation required a comprehensive revision of its guiding philosophy. Adopting a new philosophy of comprehensive education for a sustainable community marks a strategic shift. This model integrates tradition with innovation, ethics with creativity, and national identity with global engagement. Future reforms must focus on autonomy, equity, and holistic development to address historical limitations, preparing Vietnamese learners to thrive as active, ethical citizens in a rapidly globalizing world.

The reviewed literature highlights significant contributions to understanding Vietnam's educational philosophy from 1945 to the present. Foundational works such as those by Tran Trong Kim [31], Nguyen Van Huyen [33], and Pham Minh Hac [35] provide valuable historical perspectives on the evolution of Vietnam's education system, from Confucian influences to socialist reform and post-Đổi Mới modernization. Studies by Nguyen Kieu Binh [42] and Tram [43] emphasize Ho Chi Minh's socialist educational vision, in which education serves to "enlighten the people" and foster national unity, blending traditional ethics with revolutionary ideals. According to Huy's [5] and Lai's [6] views, integration of Confucian values with Marxist-Leninist principles reflects the ideological foundation that guides education during the early independence and wartime periods. In the post-1975 era, Education Law 2013 [22] and ongoing moral instruction in civic education demonstrate efforts to sustain national identity while integrating global competencies, as echoed by Hoa [44] and Boulding [45].

Comparative studies, such as those by Tu [20] and Wurfel [19], have helped clarify Vietnam's educational distinctiveness in relation to Chinese Confucian rigidity, Western liberal individualism (Locke), and utilitarian pragmatism (Bentham). These studies underscore that Vietnam prioritizes collective harmony, ethical education, and national cohesion in its evolving educational philosophy.

Studies on the history of Vietnamese educational philosophy reveal that significant research gaps persist despite existing research. Most existing literature focuses on ideological and policy-level analysis without fully addressing how philosophical principles, such as collectivism, morality, or global adaptability, are implemented at the micro-level of classrooms, schools, and communities. Empirical studies on the lived experiences of educators and students, particularly in diverse rural-urban contexts, remain limited. Moreover, the tension between maintaining traditional values and embracing modern educational practices has been acknowledged but insufficiently explored in measurable pedagogical outcomes.

This article seeks to fill that gap by examining how Vietnam's hybrid educational philosophy is applied today. Specifically, it explores how moral education, national identity, and learner autonomy coexist in contemporary curricula and pedagogy. By grounding analysis in historical and comparative frameworks, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Vietnam negotiates the past and future in shaping a sustainable, identity-driven, and globally integrated education system.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs the method of historical text analysis to examine the evolution of Vietnamese educational philosophy across four distinct stages: pre-colonial (before 1858), colonial (1858-1945), post-independence (1945-1975), and modern (1975-present). This method combines qualitative interpretation from the original literature with a critical evaluation of secondary sources to provide an insightful analysis of philosophical changes and the social impact of education [1]. The approach was chosen because it sheds light on the relationship between culture, politics, and intellect in shaping education over time, in line with Vietnam's rich historical literature [2].

The original data includes foundational texts such as the Four Letters and the Confucian Five Classics from the pre-colonial era, colonial education decrees from the French archives (the 1917 education reform), Ho Chi Minh's writings on education (1945-1969) [5], and modern policies such

as the 2013 Education Law. These resources are accessed through the National Library of Vietnam, the UNESCO archives, and the National Archives Centre I, supplemented by translations as needed. Secondary sources comprise more than 50 academic works from researchers such as Tran Trong Kim and Pham Minh Hac, as well as international reports from UNESCO and the World Bank, published between 1970 and 2023 [8; 9]. These documents provide a modern context and interpretation to understand the development of educational philosophy.

The analysis process consists of three main steps: (1) encoding the topic to identify repetitive concepts (rational, ethical, community), (2) temporal mapping to track philosophical evolution, and (3) comparing contexts to highlight Confucian influences, colonialism, socialism, and globalization [10]. The data are organized into four historical periods, each analyzed in terms of educational goals, methods, and social impacts. The approach adapts to Vietnam's pluralistic context by focusing on universal principles -reason and moral responsibility – while acknowledging local traditional influences [13].

The data collection process begins with the selection of representative texts. The Four Letters and the Five Classics were analyzed during the pre-colonial period to understand the Confucian goal, drawing on records from the Li and Chen dynasties. During the colonial period, the French education decree and Phan Boi Chau's memoirs were used to assess the impact of Western influences [15]. The post-independence period is based on Ho Chi Minh's writings and the 1950 report on eradicating illiteracy, which clarifies the socialist philosophy [43]. The modern era utilizes the Education Law of 1991 and 2013, as well as the World Bank report, to analyze the transformation.

Topic analysis is done by coding key concepts. Cultivation, ordination, and state rule appeared frequently during the pre-colonial period, indicating a moral focus. The colonial period emphasized vocational training and the national language, reflecting a pragmatic approach [1]. The post-independence period stands out for its collectives and techniques, which align with socialist principles. The modern era emphasizes comprehensive development and integration, demonstrating the combination of tradition and globalization. The time map traces the transition from moral to pragmatic, collective, and modern, while contextual comparisons clarify influences from Chinese Confucianism, French education, and Marxist thought.

The source selection and analysis process is thoroughly documented to ensure transparency. International works from Altbach and Marginson add a global perspective [27; 28]. This approach offers a theoretical framework for understanding Vietnam's educational philosophy, while also facilitating practical applications in addressing inequality and sustainability. The results are presented systematically, reflecting developments through stages, laying the foundation for discussion and conclusion [30].

RESEARCH RESULTS

1. Pre-colonial period (Before 1858)

During the pre-colonial period, before the French colonial invasion in 1858, Vietnam's educational philosophy was deeply influenced by Confucianism, which was introduced from China around the 10th century during the Ly dynasty. This education system focuses on developing moral qualities and social responsibility, based on the principles of the three cardinal virtues (ren, yi, li) and the five cardinal relationships (ren, yi, li, xin, and ai), to train individuals who can maintain the feudal social order [3]. Confucian classics such as the Treatises of Confucius and Mencius of Meng Tzu became the core of the curriculum, taught in private schools in villages (private schools) and Quoc Tu Giam, [6]. The main goal is not to develop practical skills but to cultivate morality, considering self-cultivation as the foundation for ruling the country (governing the country) and pacifying the world (stabilizing the world) [4].

The electoral system, which originated in the 11th century and was refined during the Le dynasty, was the primary tool for selecting officials, evaluating candidates on their adherence to Confucian ethics, management skills, and literary abilities. According to Tran Trong Kim, these exams assess knowledge and personal qualities, reinforcing the role of education in maintaining social order [31]. At the village level, education is less formal but still reflects this philosophy, with teachers teaching Confucian script and ethics to rural children, often through memorization and analysis of scriptures [33]. However, Nguyen Van Huyen points out that women's education is

severely limited, focusing on family virtues such as the three virtues (obedience to father, husband, and child) and the four virtues (merit, tolerance, speech, and virtue), which reflect the gender norms of Confucianism [8]. This period established an educational philosophy that focused on ethics and community responsibility, deeply rooted in Vietnam's agricultural society, and markedly different from later pragmatic models [35]. Although elitist and lacking in applicability, this philosophy has left a lasting mark on Vietnam's educational culture.

2. Colonial period (1858-1945)

The French colonial invasion in 1858 marked a significant turning point in Vietnam's educational philosophy, replacing the Confucian system with the Western educational model [8]. The colonial government established Franco-Vietnamese schools (Franco-Vietnamese schools), switching from the use of Chinese characters to French and the national script, – latinized script developed by French Jesuit monk, founder of the Paris Society of Foreign Missions Alexandre de Rhodes (1593-1660), – to train personnel for the ruling apparatus. The Education Ordinance of 1917, enacted under Governor General Albert-Pierre Sarraut (1872-1962), prioritized practical subjects such as accounting, engineering, and administrative management, gradually eliminating the Confucian moral content from the core of traditional education. According to Nguyen Thuy Anh, the main goal of this system is to produce a workforce that serves the interests of the colonies, rather than the development of Vietnamese individuals or communities. Confucian schools declined rapidly, with the last entrance exam being held in 1919 in Hue, marking the end of the old academic tradition.

However, the philosophy of colonial education is not passively accepted. Patriotic intellectuals, such as Phan Boi Chau, protested by advocating for a modern education that integrated Western science and technology with Vietnamese cultural values to foster national consciousness [11]. The Dong Du Movement (1905-1908), initiated by Phan Boi Chau, brought hundreds of students to Japan to study, demonstrating efforts to adapt to foreign knowledge while preserving their identity [40]. Pham commented that this resistance was a manifestation of a hybrid educational philosophy, both absorbing and resisting colonial imposition [41]. However, the colonial education system created a large gap between urban and rural areas. According to Le, French-Vietnamese schools are concentrated in urban areas, serving the elite, while rural areas continue to maintain traditional, informal education [39]. The educational philosophy of this period shifted from moral cultivation to pragmatic efficiency. However, the resistance showed that the spirit of identity protection was still simmering in the hearts of Vietnamese people.

3. Post-independence period (1945-1975)

After gaining independence in 1945, Vietnam, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, adopted a socialist educational philosophy that combined moral education with practical skills to build a unified and modern nation. Ho Chi Minh emphasized "learning to work, being a person, being a cadre" [14]. The Constitution (1946) provided for universal education, and the literacy campaign (1945-1950) taught more than 2 million people the national language over a five-year period, reflecting a commitment to collective progress. Hoa & Le noted that this philosophy aims not only to improve people's intellect but also to instill Marxist-Leninist ideology among the masses [44]. During the Vietnam War (1955-1975), education focused on science, agriculture, and military skills to support national defense and post-war reconstruction [43].

Confucian values such as patriotism, responsibility, and diligence have been reshaped into socialist ethics, creating a traditional and revolutionary educational model [17]. Pham Minh Hac noted that the curriculum of this period prioritized practical subjects, such as mathematics, physics, and military engineering, while also maintaining moral education through lectures on Ho Chi Minh Thought [35]. Rural education was significantly expanded, with thousands of schools built in remote areas, narrowing the urban-rural gap [28]. However, war and lack of resources have limited the scope of implementation. This period marked the transition from elitist education to education for the collective good, striking a balance between individual development and national goals in a complex context [30].

The educational philosophy of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) from 1945 to 1975, mainly from 1955 to 1975, was built on three core principles: humanism, nationalism, and liberalism. It aimed to train a comprehensive human being in a divided and war-torn country. The goal was to develop the individual, strengthen national consciousness, and prepare for a modern, democratic society aligned with the RVN's ideals.

The RVN education system encompassed primary, secondary, and tertiary education, comprising public, private, and non-public schools. Primary education was free, while secondary and tertiary education had rigorous, selective exams, with a public school admission rate of about 62%. In the 1973-1974 school year, the RVN had about 3.1 million primary school students, 1.09 million secondary school students, and 101,454 university students. By 1975, the number of university students had reached approximately 150,000, accounting for 0.75% of the population. Educational content focused on natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, while integrating ethical and national values through subjects such as civic education. Universities were autonomous under the 1967 Constitution, not directly managed by the Ministry of Education.

4. Modern period (1975-present)

After reunification in 1975, Vietnam's educational philosophy evolved under the Doi Moi policy (1986), which combined socialist ideals with market-oriented reforms [19]. The 1991 Education Law emphasizes "human resource development" for industrialization, including STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) and foreign language subjects in the curriculum to meet global needs [20]. International integration brings Western influences such as critical and creative thinking, which is reflected in the Education Law 2013 with the goal of "comprehensive development" in parallel with the protection of national identity [22].

Rural education is improved through infrastructure investment programs, such as the Government's Program 135. The World Bank report (2020) indicates that enrolment rates increase significantly in remote areas, but urban-rural disparities persist, with urban students excelling in achievement [19]. Environmental education emerged in the early 21st century to address climate change, with initiatives such as "Green Schools" being implemented since 2008 [24]. Today, Vietnam's educational philosophy is a hybrid between tradition (ethics, community) and modernity (innovation, global competition), adapting to the pressure of globalization while retaining its identity. This balance reflects Vietnam's resilience in the face of new challenges.

DISCUSSION

To further clarify Vietnam's educational philosophy, comparisons with advanced countries such as Japan, Finland, and the United States are necessary, because each country represents a unique educational approach that can provide valuable lessons. Then, combining Vietnam's cultural, historical, and social characteristics with the study's findings, an appropriate educational philosophy will be proposed that preserves identity and meets the requirements of sustainable development in the 21st century.

1. Educational philosophy in advanced countries

Japanese educational philosophy harmoniously combines Confucian tradition and Western modernization, emphasizing the balance between individual development and community responsibility. In Vietnam, this philosophy is similarly reflected in the historical development of national philosophy, where traditional education emphasizes individual morality and is linked to national obligations. De Francis, J.'s research has clarified this when analyzing the impact of French colonialism on Vietnamese education. According to him, the educational system under the French was reorganized to serve the goal of governance, prioritizing French for the elite and popularizing the Quoc Ngu script to the masses. However, the popularization of the Quoc Ngu script unintentionally aroused the patriotic movement and strongly strengthened the sense of the Vietnamese national community [8]. Since the Meiji period (1868), Japan's education system has undergone reform to support industrialization. Still, it retains values such as discipline, respect for the collective, and a sense of responsibility, emphasizing harmony, encouraging students to work in groups, and adhering to social norms. Subjects such as ethics (dōtoku) are integrated to foster a sense of community, while STEM and practical skills are emphasized to meet the demands of the global economy. This is similar to pre-colonial Vietnam in terms of moral focus, but it excels in modernization without losing its identity. However, the Japanese system is sometimes criticized for the pressure of exams and lack of individual creativity.

Finland's progressive educational philosophy emphasizes equality, creativity, and holistic personal development. Meanwhile, I agree with Wurfel's research that these principles resonate with certain aspects of Vietnam's contemporary educational reform, particularly in the commitment to expanding access to education for all social groups and fostering personal growth beyond rote memorization [19]. I agree with Sahlberg's observation that the Finnish system creates a flexible and student-centered environment by prioritizing project-based learning and critical thinking over standardized testing. This approach aligns with Vietnam's recent efforts to shift toward competency-based education, encouraging students' active engagement and innovation. Additionally, the Nordic ideal that education serves as a means of personal liberation and social justice parallels Vietnam's constitutional commitment to education as a universal right. However, a key difference emerges. As highlighted in the research, Finland's model emphasizes individual autonomy and creativity [46], while Vietnamese educational traditions, historically and presently, strongly emphasize collective ethics, community responsibility, and moral cultivation. Pre-colonial Vietnam's education system was elitist and selective, focusing on Confucian values and hierarchical social structures, which contrasted with Finland's egalitarian approach [46]. Therefore, while Finland offers valuable lessons in promoting creativity and equality, the Vietnamese tradition focuses on communal harmony and social educational obligations, which remain a cornerstone of today's philosophy.

The strengths of American educational philosophy are creativity and equality. They originate from John Locke's liberalism, which emphasizes individual freedom, creativity, and critical thinking [47]. I agree with the research of Boulding, who believed that John Dewey was the next significant influence on American educational philosophy, viewing education as a means to foster personal development through experiential learning, thereby further reinforcing this tradition [45]. These principles share some common ground with Vietnam's ongoing educational reform, especially in the growing emphasis on fostering students' creativity, self-exploration, and practical skills. I agree with the statements noted by Tien et al [30]. Vietnam's shift towards competency-based education and cultural diversification reflects a convergence with American priorities in promoting adaptability for a dynamic labor market. However, a fundamental difference remains: American education places relatively little emphasis on collective ethics and social obligations, while Vietnam's educational philosophy, both historically and currently, continues to stress the importance of community, moral cultivation, and collective responsibility. Moreover, competition and socio-economic disparities, characteristic of the U.S. system, contrast sharply with Vietnam's aspiration for equitable educational opportunities for all Vietnamese. In assessing the current trajectory of Vietnamese education, I agree with the analysis of Tien et al. [30], who highlight Vietnam's efforts toward sustainable, inclusive development while cautiously integrating global educational trends without abandoning traditional collective values.

2. In combination with Vietnamese characteristics

Vietnam's educational philosophy possesses distinct characteristics that must be preserved while integrating advanced international models. A strong point of convergence lies with Tran Trong Kim's [31] analysis, which emphasizes the Confucian tradition of community responsibility and moral cultivation, shaping a society that prioritizes collective well-being over individual pursuits. I also agree with Kha and Phuong [28], who argue that Vietnam's colonial and revolutionary experiences have forged a resilient educational system capable of adapting to external pressures while safeguarding national identity. Doi Moi (1986) further highlighted the dual imperative of fostering economic development and protecting cultural values, reinforcing the need for a flexible yet grounded educational philosophy [19]. However, differences emerge when comparing Vietnam to models like Finland and the United States. While Van Sen and Tho [34] commend Vietnam's capacity for harmonizing tradition and globalization, the Finnish emphasis on individual autonomy and creativity does not fully align with Vietnam's collective-oriented educational culture. Moreover, although the American educational system provides valuable lessons in critical thinking and curricular diversification [47; 46], its high levels of competition and inequality present challenges that Vietnam must consciously avoid. Unlike Finland's and the U.S. individualistic approaches, Vietnam's tradition of solidarity, patriotism, and adaptability forms a coherent foundation for educational reform that seeks to balance modernization with cultural preservation. Thus, while lessons from Finland and the U.S. are relevant, the unique Vietnamese context, as documented by Tran Trong Kim [31] and Kha and Phuong [28], must remain central in shaping future educational policies, ensuring that modernization strengthens rather than dilutes Vietnam's collective ethos.

3. Proposing an educational philosophy suitable for Vietnam

Based on the above analysis, the educational philosophy most suitable for Vietnam in the 21st century can be defined as “Comprehensive Education for a Sustainable Community”, balancing tradition and innovation, collective and individual development, while addressing modern challenges such as inequality, globalization, and sustainability. This philosophy integrates three key elements:

1. Moral Education and Community Responsibility. This component aligns closely with the findings of Huy [5] and De Francis [8], both of whom emphasize the lasting influence of Confucian ethics and collective responsibility in Vietnamese society. Inheriting the values of benevolence, ceremony, righteousness, wisdom, and faith, education must continue cultivating social responsibility, similar to Japan’s dōtoku system. This approach helps maintain cultural identity and mitigates moral fragmentation in the face of technological advancements. I agree with De Francis that reinforcing community ethics is vital in resisting cultural disintegration caused by colonial legacies and modern pressures. Furthermore, enhancing civic education to combine theoretical teaching with practical community engagement is essential for sustaining a cohesive social fabric.

2. Comprehensive personal and creative development. The emphasis on fostering critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills resonates with global educational reforms, particularly lessons from Finland and the United States. This perspective is consistent with Huy’s [5] arguments, which recognized the need to transcend rote learning traditions. It is also firmly supported by Vietnam’s Education Law 2013 [22], which prioritizes comprehensive human development. Integrating STEM, arts, and liberal arts education while reducing exam pressures will encourage students’ self-exploration and adaptability. This model modernizes learning content, equipping students with versatile competencies essential for the demands of the knowledge economy and sustainable development.

3. Global and sustainable integration. This element aligns with Shen and Jiang’s research [17], which emphasizes the importance of global citizenship education, digital skills, and environmental awareness in urban and national development. Initiatives like “Green Schools” and the integration of vocational training will better prepare students for a sustainable labor market. Moreover, the commitment to reducing urban-rural educational disparities aligns with Geiger’s [18] assertion that equitable access to quality education is foundational for long-term national resilience. By learning from Finland’s model of equality, Vietnam can ensure that modernization efforts do not exacerbate existing inequalities.

4. Building human resources in economic development

Vietnam’s contemporary educational philosophy, centered on the principles of “openness, practical learning, humanistic values, and creativity”, is increasingly becoming a vital foundation for developing a high-quality workforce to support economic growth in the new era. In the context of deep globalization and the rapid transformation driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, education is no longer limited to transmitting knowledge; it must cultivate individuals with the competencies and qualities needed to master technology, adapt flexibly, and contribute meaningfully to sustainable national development. The principle of “openness” emphasizes the linkage between education, the community, the business sector, and the global environment. This allows the educational system to access new knowledge, adopt advanced training models, and respond promptly to the evolving requirements of the labor market. An open education enables learners to access diverse learning resources, embrace lifelong learning, and easily shift career pathways in a rapidly changing economy. This openness creates a dynamic workforce with a global mindset and strong adaptability.

The concept of “practical learning” highlights the importance of learning by doing and prioritizes competency over credentials. This aligns with the needs of modern economies, where employers seek workers who possess strong professional skills and can apply knowledge to real-world problem-solving. Expanding project-based learning, internships, and school-business-research cooperation helps narrow the gap between training and employment, enabling fresh graduates to contribute effectively from day one. This not only enhances labor productivity but also improves the competitiveness of the economy. The “humanistic” dimension aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals in intellect, ethics, physical well-being, and aesthetics, people with professional integrity, a sense of responsibility, and the ability to collaborate. In modern economic environments, these values help build a healthy workplace culture, reduce ethical risks, and strengthen cohesion within organizations. A humanistic workforce is particularly essential for sustainable development, especially in service industries, education, healthcare, and knowledge-based sectors.

Finally, the emphasis on “creativity” is crucial for an innovation-driven economy where knowledge and ideas generate superior value. An education system that fosters creativity encourages learners to think critically, take initiative, experiment with new solutions, and pursue entrepreneurship and technological innovation. When the workforce is capable of creativity, businesses enhance their competitiveness, develop new products and services, and contribute to the transformation of the country’s growth model. Overall, Vietnam’s current educational philosophy, when effectively applied to workforce development, helps shape a labor force that possesses knowledge, skills, ethical qualities, and an innovative mindset. This is a decisive condition for Vietnam to increase labor productivity, attract high-quality investment, expand participation in global value chains, and move toward building a sustainable, modern, and competitive knowledge-based economy.

In conclusion, the philosophy of “Comprehensive Education for a Sustainable Community” combines Vietnam’s ethical traditions with the strengths of Japan, Finland, and the United States. It provides a coherent roadmap for Vietnam to harmonize cultural preservation with innovation, requiring strategic investment in teacher training, curriculum reform, and infrastructure development.

4. Future research directions

This study aligns with the findings of Kha and Phuong [28], who emphasize that Vietnam’s educational philosophy is deeply rooted in its historical experience while simultaneously guiding future development. It also shares conceptual alignment with Boulding [45] and Sahlberg [46], particularly in recognizing the role of education in building sustainable and globally connected societies. The suggestion to compare Vietnam’s educational philosophy with those of Korea and Singapore reflects a consistent understanding of how Confucian values interact with modernization across East Asia. Furthermore, the call for empirical studies to evaluate the effectiveness of moral and creative education aligns with Nazar’s [47] emphasis on liberal educational practices centered on critical thinking and adaptability. These converging perspectives highlight that Vietnam’s philosophy is not static; it evolves to meet the dual demands of preserving tradition and integrating globally. The “Comprehensive education for a sustainable community” proposed here provides a practical framework, guiding Vietnam in harmonizing cultural identity with global educational trends. Thus, future research should continue this multidimensional exploration, strengthening Vietnam’s unique educational trajectory within the broader context of sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Vietnamese educational philosophy has undergone various historical stages, from its Confucian roots, which emphasized morality and social order, to colonial pragmatism and post-independence socialist ideals. And now it’s the intersection of tradition and innovation in the context of globalization. The analysis reveals a pervasive vein: a delicate balance between individual development and collective responsibility, manifested in the ability to adapt to Confucianism, colonialism, socialism, and modern pressures. In contrast to Locke’s liberalism or Bentham’s short-term pragmatism, Vietnamese philosophy emphasizes community harmony, affirming a unique identity that transcends the limitations of Western ideologies. This philosophy isn’t only a historical heritage, but also has profound practical implications, suggesting solutions to contemporary challenges such as inequality and inclusive and sustainable education. Comparisons with Japan (community ethics), Finland (creative equality), and the United States (critical thinking) reveal the potential to combine international values with Vietnamese identity. The “Comprehensive Education for Sustainable Communities” philosophy is proposed, blending traditional ethics, modern creativity, and global responsibility. The future academic journey should aim to make a deeper comparison with East Asia and explore its international role, affirming that reason and virtue are the guiding principles for Vietnamese education today.

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