

KEY POINTS OF THE RADICAL AND COMPREHENSIVE REFORM IN VIETNAM'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM

Nguyen Vinh Hien, Former Vice Minister of Vietnam Education and Training

Received: 01/09/2017; Revised: 04/09/2017; Accepted: 15/10/2017.

Abstract: In order to radically and comprehensively reform Vietnam's education and training system, it's necessary that all government levels and sectors share responsibilities and resolution; the whole political system and society brainstorm and join hands. This paper analyses the core and essential problems and proposes innovative solutions in the radical and comprehensive reform of contemporary education and training system in Vietnam.

Keywords: basis content, reform, education, training.

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to meet the new requirements of national development and defense and adapt into the contemporary social contexts of Vietnam, the education system is subject to “*wide-ranging*” (comprehensive) and “*in-depth*” (radical) reforms. Resolution No 29-NQ/TW dated 4/11/2013 by Central Executive Committee on “*radical and comprehensive education and training reform in response to the requirements of industrialisation and modernisation in the socialist-oriented market economy and global integration*” (henceforth NQ29) points out the key points of the reforms. For learners, “*it's necessary to develop comprehensively and exploit exclusively the personal potentials and creativity*”; For the education system, “*to develop an open education system which is in alignment with the establishment of learning society*”. These key points serve as the general objectives of the education and training reform process.

This paper discusses some basis content of the current radical and comprehensive reform of education and training.

2. CONTENT

2.1. Two core issues of Education and Training Reform

2.1.1. Reformation of Teaching Methodology to develop learners' competence and qualities

NQ29 highlighted the need to “switch the educational focus from transferring knowledge to developing learners' comprehensive competences and qualities” and “maintain influential and systematic reform of every basic element of education and training to develop learners' competences and qualities.”

These days, educational reform prioritizes developing citizens' personalities and exploiting their finest potentials instead of equipping them with knowledge. Human's memory capacity is limited while knowledge is unlimited and constantly expands and changes at

increasing pace everyday due to the social development; thus, it's essential for each individual to possess adaptation competence to ever-changing contexts. Consequently, education must firstly focus on learners' competences such as thinking competence, problem-identifying and solving competences as well as learning methods and self-study.

In 2015, UNESCO warned that: “Never before has learning how to learn become so important”. Education reform requires that the teaching content must be concise, basic, modern and practical; teaching methodology must ensure learners know how to discover knowledge by themselves, hence know how to learn. Also, it's necessary to balance between classroom formal learning with experiential activities; develop learners' competence of independent thinking, self-studying and self-motivation. Moreover, there is essential need to combine integrated teaching (to achieve the application competence, especially in the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics, STEAM, in response to the 4.0 Science Revolution) with segregated teaching (to adapt with individual cognition and needs); to evaluate learners' application competence in solving problems in their study and life. It's necessary to reform all basic elements of the educational program, including its objectives, content, teaching methodology and organisation, and testing and assessment.

As a result, there is a need of a new competence-based general education program to replace the existing content-based one. Ideally, vocational education should efficiently provide learners with profound knowledge and skills, professional working style and responsibilities. University education has to develop learners' creativity and self-study competence.

2.1.2. Building an open educational system and life-long learning society

Nowadays, dramatic advance in science and technology, especially in the field of information technology and communication opens endless learning opportunities for everyone, not only from schools but from various sources. Consequently, the indispensibility of once-for-a-lifetime school education is no longer valid. This belief centres formal education in which education is “framed” by the school walls and separated from society and community. Therefore, knowledge is impractical, insufficient and outdated, particularly in vocational and tertiary education.

“The open education system” and “citizen participation in education” are supposed to be closely integrated. So educational institutes can flexibly maintain internal elements (content, methods, timing, space, resources, subjects, etc.) and cooperate harmoniously with external factors. Thus, they could sustain creativity, effectively mobilise resources, promote learning needs and create opportunities for all to meet the rapid and varied development of science, technology, and other sectors and social activities. Education should not only focus on formal learning, which only happens in certain stages of life but also informal learning, which is necessary in one's entire lifetime. In a learning society, education is shared responsibilities of Vietnam, Government and everyone. A learning society guarantees regular and life-long learning opportunities for every individual; reserves education privileges for people under preferential treatment policy, ethnic minorities, women, disadvantaged people and regions with underdeveloped socio-economic conditions. Every individual is expected to get involved in educational activities. So every social activity is educational and there is general unity between schools and society. To successfully achieve all the above mentioned objectives, it is important that:

- Educational content closely links to the local and national manufacturing and trading activities. Learning outcomes would be improved when learners find targeted knowledge practical and useful when dealing with problems during their learning process and in their real life. In recent years, several schools have integrated their teaching with local manufacturing and trading operation. Then, artists, engineers and technical workers can be teachers. For example, in the project named “The Tea-Farm School”, students learned about the natural habitat, suitable climatic and pedological conditions for the tea plant, tea planting and growing, and tea processing techniques, etc. Students go to school and in the mean time help their family with the

tea production or work in a local tea trading company at some certain stages of tea production. In vocational and tertiary education, it's necessary that schools cooperate with local companies and organisations to regularly review, update and reform the training content and methods in order to satisfy the output criteria and closely link to the regional and national socio-economic practice.

- Schools actively involve in social activities. Teachers and students are expected to actively participate in social events in the local community such as cultural and sporting events, tree planting festival, youth volunteering programs, inter-schools and school-enterprise exchanges and experience sharing workshops, charity programs for schools in remote and disadvantaged areas, etc. These activities not only have charitable meaning (secondary purpose) but, more importantly, serve educational purposes (primary purpose): promoting learners and teachers' emotional intelligence and action competences; encouraging learners' families and donors to involve and contribute to social and educational development. Through those activities, schools can contribute to local communities as well as expand the educational time and context for vocational purposes.

- Parental role in education needs to be emphasized. UNESCO states that “Teachers need to cooperate with parents and community.” Under specific circumstances, Schools need to raise the awareness and encourage the involvement of students' families in educational activities at schools or at homes. Some schools invite students' families to attend school meetings or exhibitions or even to personally participate in educational activities (observing teaching and learning activities in classes, organising experiential events, presenting, teaching craftsmanship, etc.). As a result, they can understand the meanings, impacts and approaches of educational reform so as to approve and contribute to the reformation process by installing classroom bookshelves, helping their children to fulfil educational tasks which relate to their real life experience at home or in the local community. Currently, there is an urgent need to change the belief of the society, the education field and students' parents on the importance of high quality education and effective teaching methods. It's also important to understand that learning can take place not only in classrooms, with books and teachers or at homes but also can happen when students do their household chores or daily routines. For instance, children can learn by discussing

with their families the news, a random event or a movie of their age (under the educational parental guidance).

- Social resources are effectively mobilised and exploited for educational purposes. A good school is supposed to successfully mobilise various resources from the society, as State's resources for education, even with full support, is always hardly sufficient to improve education quality. However, it's essential that schools should not allocate social resources into useless or ineffective activities or request unwilling contribution to avoid negative reactions from donors and students' families. Social resource (personnel, ideas, finance, facilities) mobilization can only be fruitful if the school's resource utilization is convincing. Thus, first, schools need to clarify the usefulness and immediate benefits to students of the mobilised resources; then guarantee the efficient allocation and exploitation of the resources (reasonable, transparent, supervised, fruitful and acknowledged, etc.); and finally achieve the real outcome. Positive outcome will certainly enable future mobilisation opportunities while negative one will destroy students' families, society's trust and further future opportunities.

2.2. Two essential issues of education and training reform

2.2.1. Management mechanism reform

NQ29 states that it's necessary to balance socialist-oriented influence and market mechanism drive in the field of education, to undermine the overwhelming dominance of the former. Public education and private education are equal sectors. The former should be considered as the fundamental solution to promote education quality, especially in urban areas, with vocational and tertiary education. The Government is expected to equally support learners in public and private education institutes.

Teachers in both sectors receive the same opportunities for rewarding, training and professional development. Education evaluation makes use of self-assessment, input assessment, ongoing assessment and output assessment; so appraisal of training program and training organisations and dissemination of appraisal result are also crucial. Quantitative education still remains as a direction for development but qualitative education takes over the top priority. Educational institutes are granted with greater self-control and self-responsibility accompanied by greater social supervision, and responsibilities to justify and disseminate their actions and outcomes. State and school management are clearly distinguished in terms of roles, capacities and responsibilities. Local education

and training authorities monitor schools' personnel, finance and professional performance.

The centred-planning management mechanism in the past can be understood as "Command and Control" mechanism. Staff at lower work levels had to closely follow the higher management levels' instructions and strictly limit the democracy and creativity from either schools or individuals regardless of the varied local circumstances. It's time to switch to "authorisation and supervision" management mechanism. In this mechanism, State authorities provide the mechanism, policies, education programs and standards; school managerial personnel adapt and implements the customized educational program, schedules, and measures in their specific circumstances to maximize the effect and successfully fulfil the registered and approved educational objectives. NQ29 highlights the need to "distinguish the state and school management" as follows:

- Schools reserve self-control over their resources. Schools can make their own decisions to exploit the annual quota from the Government or provincial People's Committees and their legally mobilised financial resources with their personalized school year action plans. The principal has the rights to manage school personnel (recruiting, distributing, evaluation, rewarding, etc.) in accordance with the staff's performances and Government's policies. Thus, principals and teachers are more aware of their responsibilities; consequently, their performances will be improved.

It's advisable to apply the pre-order mechanism in vocational and tertiary education based on economic-engineering projections and quality standards of certain training services, regardless of public or private schools. Subsequently, educational institutes are granted with self-management to balance resources from learning tuitions and from State funding. Only then can schools allocate money to invite experts, engineers or craftsmen, etc. to teach at the schools or facilitate and instruct students' learning activities. This is the solution to the lack of teachers in certain subjects and to promoting flexibility in educational programs in order to satisfy practical workforce demands from local communities and employers. Moreover, some schools in Vietnam even mobilise resources to cooperate with international organisations to exchange teachers and students in various activities such as workshops, visiting scholar program, exhibitions, international contests, international festivals, etc. Some schools develop dual degree programs in which students can graduate with 2

degrees (from a Vietnamese university and a foreign university). Some vocational organisations and universities utilise international curriculum to improve students' competences, thus to increase their employment and higher education opportunities.

- Schools decide their own educational activities. At university level, Ministry of Education and Training used to control 70% of the training content with a fixed curriculum while the universities controlled only 30%. Even the university entrance examination was organised by the Ministry. Nowadays, universities have been granted with full and self-control. They also publicly set the output standards as a guarantee for the training and education quality.

As for general education, since 2013, it's common that schools customize the general curriculum designed by Ministry of Education and Training to their specific needs regarding all core elements of the training program (objectives, content, organisation, methodology, testing and assessment) as well as management. The aims of this policy is to promote school teachers and managers' dynamics and creativity, overcome the weaknesses of current general curriculum and textbooks; promote the application of updated teaching approaches and methods (active teaching methodology): project-based learning, students' scientific research, teaching mathematics and natural sciences in English, promoting experiential learning, etc. to encourage external support (technical and financial, etc.) from well-off student's families and to provide theoretical and empirical background for curriculum and textbook reformation at this level.

2.2.2. Improving teaching and managerial personnel

It's necessary to be aware of teachers' new roles as learning activities organisers, monitors, and facilitators during student's process of active and creative learning and personality developing instead of knowledge transferers as they used to be in the past. Teachers are now expected to have professional competence and profound knowledge of general culture and relevant scientific disciplines. Teachers are also educators, scientists and life-long learners.

This is the reform guideline for teacher training institutes to catch up with the changes at local schools. The next leading mission of teacher training institutes in the upcoming years is to retrain in-service teachers to meet the requirements of the updated general curriculum. Teacher training institutes, educational authorities and local schools need to establish a transparent cooperating and responsibility sharing

mechanisms in terms of functions, duties, capabilities and benefits of each party.

It's important that in-service school teachers were trained with a content-based training program rather than competence-based one. Thus, their independent thinking competence, self-studying competence, information technology competence, foreign language competence, professional competence and soft skills are insufficient; the teachers rarely have access to advanced teaching methodology and techniques (such as active teaching methods and techniques). As a result, their teaching competences are not in accordance with their teaching qualifications (which are satisfactory or even beyond the new criteria). Also, some teachers are not motivated to apply advanced teaching methods and techniques, or refused to employ alternative assessment tools due to lack of knowledge. It's also true that in-service school teacher and management training are organised in a "mass production" manner instead of being customized to personal needs.

- Teachers and principals undergo professional competence-based self-training. In the past, teachers had to participate in one common regular training program regardless of their teaching competences. Ministry of Education and Training has recently issued the open regular teacher training regulation and program (composed of modules) together with instructions for professional competence-based teacher evaluation (for teachers and principals). It's necessary that teachers assess themselves regularly and be assessed by the management board in order to identify their weaknesses and select the necessary and suitable training modules. School managers and higher management levels should facilitate training sessions (either offline or online) to answer teachers' questions, demonstrate the training modules, and provide feedbacks, etc. Setting different levels of targeted professional competence standards and launching the customised regular teacher training program (mostly self-studying) are a breakthrough in perception and implementation to achieve better efficiency and practicality in teacher training program.

- Innovating textbook aims to support teaching. Resolution No 88/2014/QH13 on "curriculum and textbooks reform in general education" claims that "Textbooks specify the requirements of general education program in terms of content and learners' competences. They also guide teachers' methods and testing and assessment. It's necessary to encourage public participation in textbook compilation so as to publish several textbooks for each school subject." As

it's impossible to separate teaching from learning, teacher-learners interactive process is now referred as teaching activity. Textbooks are expected to support both teachers and learners, especially in case teachers have insufficient teaching competence. The design of a textbook depends on the relationship between knowledge-delivery mechanisms and teaching activities. There are two typical textbook designs:

+ Lecture-based textbooks: Each lesson in the textbook is a complete lecture script followed by discussion questions or assignments to develop, reinforce and apply targeted knowledge and practice targeted skills. Teaching activities are clearly described in the textbooks while learning activities largely depend on teaching ones. Lecture-based textbooks barely support the learner activating approach. They are most commonly used at high school level nationwide and internationally but not at primary education level.

+ Task-based textbooks: This is the renovated textbook design. Each lesson is an action plan which is supported with learning activity instructions, recommendations for teaching activities, presentation and practice to reinforce and apply targeted knowledge and practice targeted skills. In the 1979 Education Reform, there were some task-based textbooks but the teachers' books still lacked detailed instructions for teaching activities and failed to provide substantial renovation. It's important that all textbooks which will be published in the near future should be task-based.

- As for university lecturers, NQ29 claims that *“College and university lecturers with master degrees or higher must undergo pedagogical training. It's essential to closely integrate training and research, training organisations and manufacturing and trading enterprises”*. The resolution also highlights: *“State-funded overseas training for lecturers of basic sciences as well as leading and featured sciences would be strongly promoted. International cultural and academic exchanges would also be supported”*. Therefore, university lecturers are expected to self-renoate through practical teaching and researching activities, to continually stimulate their knowledge and apply the world's contemporary achievements through international cooperation and exchanges.

- Innovating management activities to support teacher reform. It's important to promote democracy in education management to enhance teachers' initiatives, creativity and professional ethics. Teachers also need to gain respect from the society. As for management levels, teacher and management personnel recruitment,

allocation, rewarding and honoring need to be based on professional competences, ethics and performances rather than qualifications. It's also necessary to reduce administration tasks and paperwork so that teachers can concentrate on professional activity reform and educational quality improvement. Generally, teachers' initial reforming attempts usually encounter various challenges and obstacles and rarely achieve immediate success. Therefore, it's important that management staffs acknowledge and support their effort so that they can learn from the mistakes, improve their performance, and avoid biased and unfair judgements. During the initial phase of reform, it is advisable for management levels to avoid teacher performance ranking and appraisal without teachers' desire in order to enhance their initiative and creativity in teaching.

2.3. Solutions to education and training reform: radical reform of testing, assessment and evaluation in term of forms and methods

2.3.1. Assessment for learning

Testing aims to provide data for evaluation. Regarding purposes and significance of assessment, it is widely agreed all over the world that *“It's assessment for learning, assessment as learning, and assessment of learning.”* In Vietnam, despite some initial improvements, assessment in education still largely focus on output evaluation based on learners' scores in order to rank them. It's essential to acknowledge the role of assessment in achieving and timely improving education quality; developing learners' self-studying competence; and identifying learners' acquired qualities and competences.

Learners' interests are the first prerequisite to guarantee learning output, and to discover the knowledge by themselves. Therefore, assessment needs to focus on learning methods; provide useful feedbacks through observation in order to praise learners' achievements and support them to deal with difficulties to reach their learning goals. Also, teachers should also offer opportunities for learners to demonstrate their abilities; encourage self-comparison basing on the standards, and avoid comparison among students. Teachers should also reward students who have made improvements and overcome challenges and who contribute greatly to the class, rather than only students with remarkable academic and training achievements. The number of rewarded students is not necessarily high but what's more important is teachers' acknowledgement, encouragement, and compliment for each learner's attempt and progress.

2.3.2. *Cooperating learners' self-assessment with assessment of schools, families and society*

Learners have different cognitive characteristics and learning styles; therefore, assessment is expected to instruct learners to self-assess and learn from their own mistakes as well as give feedback to their peers and then learn from others' mistakes. By doing that, learners can gradually adjust their learning methods so as to achieve their learning outcome self-study skills. Learners' knowledge can be assessed through tests but their application competence, their attitude towards school charter can only be assessed with learners' behaviour in real life situations, or at least imaginary scenarios. Thus, it's important to cooperate schools' assessment with that of families and society. It's also the school responsibility to instruct and encourage the involvement of learners' families and social organisations in the process of education and assessment.

2.3.3. *"Varying" assessment forms and tools*

Each learner's competence and intelligence requires a compatible assessment form and tool. Recently, Ministry of Education and Training has attempted to provide training on varying learner assessment forms and tools (test, research report, presentation, extra curriculum activity report, contest entry, etc.) and educational activities. In particular, there have been training workshops on test writing, test designing in terms of difficulty level: knowledge, comprehension, application, and advanced application (adapting Bloom Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals, 1956: remembering, comprehending, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating) in order to classify learners and utilise the questions in open-ended test matrix.

2.3.4. *Reforming the national high school graduation examination and university entrance examination*

NQ29 states that "*It's necessary to reform the the national high school graduation examination in order to reduce social pressure and operation costs, restore its credibility, fairness and accuracy to the public, and provide data for student recruitment at vocational and university education level. University student recruitment should be based on both academic results at high school and disciplinary demands. Higher education institutes should be granted with self-control over student recruitment*". The reform aims at innovating 3 features of the examination: - Higher efficiency in implementation process; - Fairness and Objectivity; - Competence-based assessment content

and methods which is capable of giving feedback to teaching and learning, instead of memory tests.

These features can only be achieved by reforming the process of test designing, delivering and scoring procedures, implementation process and testing appraisal activities. There is a need for a step-by-step reform procedure for the examination in accordance with teaching content, methodology and ongoing assessment reform. Thus, it's necessary to propose separate and well-planned projects in this area instead of random, piecemeal, ineffective, or biased reforming attempts.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Resolution Number 29 specifies the ideas of education reform discussed in the official documents of the 12th National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party: "There is a need for radical and comprehensive education and training reform with the aim of promoting international exchange and globalisation, forming learning society, and developing citizens' competences, physical health, personality, morality, lifestyle, awareness of law-abiding and social responsibilities." Only when the whole political system joins hands and share responsibilities with great determination and brainpower, can the reform of education and training achieve complete success.

REFERENCES

- [1] Central Executive Committee. *Resolution Number 29-NQ/TW dated 04/11/2013 on radical and comprehensive reform of education and training in respond to the requirements of industrialisation and modernisation in the socialist-oriented market economy and global integration context.*
- [2] National Assembly of the Social Republic of Vietnam. *Resolution Number 88/2014/QH13 dated 28/11/2014 on curriculum and textbook for general education reform.*
- [3] Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration. (2017). *The 4th Industrial Revolution: Challenges and Opportunities for Vietnam. The Publishing House of Political Theory.*
- [4] Viet Nam Academy of Educational Sciences. (2016). *Education reform in Vietnam and Asia: Experience sharing and empirical lessons. Conference Paper.*
- [5] Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training. (2012). *Some theoretical and empirical issues of educational leadership and management in the era of reform. Professional Development Project for High school and vocational school teachers.*