

# The Analysis of Vietnam Education Development: Impacts of Vietnam War Perspective

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**Keywords:** Education, Vietnam War, Economic, Political Economy of Education Development, History.

**Abstract:** After the Vietnam War in 1975, Vietnam's economic development and education system continued to develop. With this long-term development, Vietnam has become one of the world's highest literacy rates countries. As time moving, more and more researchers want to know how the Vietnamese are cultivating the knowledge rate. People think they have their own cultural background, others consider that Vietnam has a good policy system or leader. This research paper analyses how the Vietnamese develop their education system from multiple perspectives such as educational background, the impact of the Vietnam War, national policies, and economic factors.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

"Are you sure Vietnam has one of the world's highest literacy rates?" I asked my friend, Katherine in surprise.

"Yes, I am. I have another interesting data. In Vietnam's rural areas, the education system has been nearly as well developed as in urban areas, and in 1989, 87 percent of the rural population has ability of literacy. I don't know why their education had big improvement after the Vietnam War." She described it to me with an uncanny expression. The above story could relate to other historical data which showed that after the Vietnam War in 1975, Vietnam's development of economic and education system continues to develop. This development also raises the rate of literacy in Vietnam.

As time goes by, more and more researchers want to know how the Vietnamese improved the rate of literacy in a short period. Some people consider that they had profound cultural background. Some people focus on their good leader. However, Vietnam's policies could not be the most important factor in the improvement of Vietnam's education. Although the Vietnam War had devastation in their country, it also pushed Vietnam's educational reform. Whenever people mention the topic of the Vietnam education system, we should look back to the Vietnamese education historical processes at first.

## 2 VIETNAM'S EDUCATION ROOTS (THE LATE 19TH CENTURY TO THE MID 20TH CENTURY)

In the period between the late 19th century to mid 20th century, Vietnam's education system falls into two distinct periods.

One of the educational roots of Vietnam had named the Feudal Period. Before the 19th century, Vietnamese accepted cultures and education in several different ways, such as Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. But over time, in the nineteenth century, Confucianism became the most important influence in Vietnam's culture and education system. Neil L. Jamieson, who works at The University of California Press, talked about the ideas of Confucianism of yin and yang in his book, *Understanding Vietnam*. He mentioned that yin and yang is one of the most important ideas in Confucianism. Vietnamese traditional society consists by a system of yin and yang. For the traditional Vietnamese, their culture consisted by the whole Confucianism idea, not only consisted by yin and yang rule (Jamieson, 2005). An Academic journal, *East Asia: An International Quarterly*, explains that China had contact with Vietnam for more than two millennia. A significant event happened in the seventeenth century; some people

who were from the Ming dynasty arrived in Vietnam they formed a Sino-Vietnamese ethnic community. Sino-Vietnamese further promoted cultural integration between Vietnam and China (Nguyen, 2016). Whitmore, a researcher at the Michigan University, had recorded that some Sino-Vietnamese form a new leadership group and noted: “the diplomatic corps of nineteenth-century Vietnam was made up largely of Minhuong” (Whitmore, 1996). These results could show that the Confucianism education system had an important place in Vietnam’s original history. Even as time goes by, Vietnamese increases communication with other outside countries, their ambassadors grew up with Chinese traditional education. So, Confucianism could be Vietnam’s education system root.

With a power change in the late 19th century, the French colonized Vietnam. Because of the domination of the French, Vietnam’s education system had started to involve the west education system. The French government built the schools for the Vietnamese. However, those schools’ teachers taught in French, and the government had limits and policies for Vietnamese to enter school. For example, some schools only taught French Children. Those policies caused 95 percent of Vietnamese to not have literacy ability in the period of the late 19th century to the mid-20th century.

Based on the influence of Confucianism and the French education system in Vietnam’s education and culture, and with some problems in the education system, people’s cultural communications, economic development, or human life gradually appeared many problems in the early-20th century. The problems, which came from different areas, made people’s dissatisfaction with life led Vietnam to the country’s independence in the mid-20th century. This trend also led to later wars and more changes in education.

### **3 THE VIETNAM WAR’S CHANGE ON THE VIETNAM’S EDUCATION STYLE**

When scholars compared the different education styles before and after the Vietnam War, they found families’ opinions on education had changed. Before the war, because of the French policies of schools and the Vietnamese family’s financial problems, they did not have the ability to send their children to school. So, Vietnamese had family education style or homeschool at that time. Children learned the

knowledge from their families, such as Morales, religion, behavior, business and public relations with the world (Jamieson, 2005).

With the Vietnam War coming, the Vietnam education style faced a new challenge. Nguyen wrote an article on Lancaster County School Board, which explained some history, culture, and education system in Vietnam. In his article, he mentioned that the Vietnam government would check all 17-year-old students’ educational status by using the military census. After the military census, they would determine whether this student should finish senior high school. This government action changed their education system from family education style to school style. They used this method to get more people to attend classes. However, this military census action failed. The financial problems of the family and the influence of the Vietnam War on students constitute the two most important reasons for students not to study (Nguyen, Chinh B, 1976). For example, some parents wanted their children to go to school, but they did, more stress occurred in the family and even resulted in the family not having enough money to continue living. On the other hand, while the war was happening, people lived in fear of betrayal. They only cared about their physical desires, drinking, loving, smoking and eventual death. Based on this state they even could not consider what they should do. So, how could students concentrate on learning or studying knowledge? To live would be the most important thing during the Vietnam War period. Although the Vietnam government recognized the importance of education to the country, due to the advent of war, the Vietnamese education system could not improve immediately.

Due to the country splitting into two countries from 1955 to 1975, Vietnam witnessed two completely different education systems: The Soviet model used in the Northern part, and the American and French model used in the Southern part (Warner, 2007). This phenomenon could show that Vietnam had utilized many different kinds of education systems in their country. Those different education systems from different countries had a certain impact on the development of the education system of Vietnam after the Vietnam War.

#### **4 FRANCE AND THE UNITED STATES COMPETED ON EDUCATION MISSIONS DURING THE VIETNAM WAR**

In South Vietnam, they had two big culturally advance educational communication parties-France and The United States, which affected the development of South Vietnam's education system. But France and the United States had different goals and opinions of Vietnam's educational development. France and America had competed to be the highest influence of education systems at that time. They both helped Vietnam to advance and develop its education system in different ways. But why did France and the United States have the competition in the first place?

A researcher, who works at Paris Descartes University, shows that in the French's view, during France's colonial period, the French government provided an "extremely good" educational system in Vietnam. Their education system just worked for French children and selected children of Indochinese elites. Obviously, under this "civilizing mission" system, most Vietnamese did not have the ability to read and write. Although France already left Vietnam, they still focused on their influence of education of mission Culturelle, and they thought that their education system performed better than another education system. The French thought that the Vietnamese should continuously concentrate on this idea, the Vietnam government should keep the influence on Vietnamese elites, and let their nationals rely on those scholars. However, the government of the United States had different opinions than the French government. The Americans considered that they wanted to improve the education level of the population of Vietnam, and the Americans would help the Vietnamese administration to reform.

When France heard about America's plan, they engaged in a period of debate and competition with the United States, and they wanted to regain their footing in South Vietnam. During the 1960s, the Americans had a big revolution in education. The curricula experienced reformation to decrease the pressure and weight of examinations on students (Nguyen, 2014).

With the influence of France's colonial period and the Vietnam War started, and the effects of the United States joined the War and formally began to help Vietnam reform the education system, Vietnam's extremely long, traditional education system gradually

merged with western culture and system. Vietnam also could gain many resources, experiences, and knowledge to prepare for further reform of education after the Vietnam War. In fact, the Vietnam War gave opportunities to the Vietnamese to contacts different peoples with which to facilitate cultural and economic interchanges. It had a profound influence on the development of Vietnam education.

#### **5 THE EDUCATION REFORM AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR**

After Vietnam gained independence after the Vietnam War, they directly reformed their economic system and education system. In April 1975, Vietnam declared that a unified country was established in the world. During the reform of the education system, the government concentrated on two points. The education administration department should establish a system to eliminate the residual effects in the old education system. They also needed to focus on the group of 12-50 years old people because most of those groups of people grew without education during the war period. So, the Vietnam government helped them learning basic knowledge through a new program called anti-illiteracy.

However, the old education reform published within a decade since 1975, the development of Vietnam's education and economics did not have significant growth until 1986. In 1986, the Vietnam government published a policy called "Doi Moi (renovation)," and Doi Moi helped Vietnam have a quick improvement in economics. The Vietnam government gave more financial aid to the education system. The advantages of Doi Moi led Vietnam's education system to innovative breakthroughs in the higher education system. When Vietnam published the Doi Moi policy in 1986, this policy was dominated by the capitalist system. So, all educators should train their students to be independent thinkers, and they should have capitalistic thinker's characteristics (Thanh, 2011).

The Vietnam War brought the Vietnamese people to explore new education systems. The following consequences with exploring have many side effects. Whether or not the influence of the Vietnam War was positive or negative for the Vietnamese, it is right to keep the idea of exploring and developing. On the other hand, although Vietnam has the decision to reform and develop the education system, the Vietnam postwar economy made the Vietnam education system had a slow development.

## **6 THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE VIETNAM WAR, VIETNAM ECONOMICS AND VIETNAM EDUCATION**

War always brings damage to humans and countries. Vietnam also cannot avoid the war damages on economics, assets, environment, culture, education and many different views. As I mentioned before, financial problem is one of the most important reasons to Vietnamese who cannot have a good educational system. Before the war, France controlled Vietnam. Vietnamese could not develop and maintain their economy by themselves. At the same time, the French government only provided high-quality education for elites. The Vietnamese lived at the bottom of society. They did not have enough money to send their children to go to school, and they also did not have the qualifications to enter high-quality French schools. Economics became one of the most important factors that caused the low rate of literacy in Vietnam in those decades.

During the war, the Vietnam government had divided into two parts, south and north. Whether south or north Vietnam, they both had to spend all of the money on the cost of the war. So, the Vietnam War exacerbated social and economic pressures in Vietnam. Even more deplorable is that the Vietnam War let the government have no surplus money to maintain the education system and other important matters. This fact caused a period of default in Vietnam's education. Vietnamese would take long time to reconstruct their education system. The following consequences could lead to a more backward development in Vietnam and other countries.

According to the after-war damage statistics, the destruction of the southern society and population, farmland and forest spraying herbicide, destroyed the infrastructure, created food shortages, caused displacement at millions of refugees. An estimated 3 million became unemployed. 500,000 prostitutes emerged, along with 100,000 drug addicts and 800,000 orphans (Tarling, 1999). Based on this situation, one official later admitted 'Because we won the war, we thought we could do anything successfully,' and the government believed that they could solve all of the problems (Sue, 1989). Because of their conceit, Vietnam's economy still experienced a slow development during this period. Due to insufficient financial support for education programs, education did not have significant improvement.

However, with the economics improving after the war, Vietnam's education financial aspects also had improved. According to data from previous research, the Vietnam government would expend 7,100 billion (10.08% of the national budget) to reestablish their education system in 1996. They wanted to increase their education budget to be 18% of the national budget in 2005 and 22 % by 2010. By 2004, Vietnam already have 35,239 educational institutions, above 34% of middle schools are private, and 10.8% of higher education organizations are private (Huong 2004). Those figures make clear that the government has encouraged education, but it is still constrained by the country's budget shortfall. The Education network experienced preliminary consolidation.

## **7 ANALYSIS**

Nowadays, Vietnam has one of the world's highest literacy rates, and the Vietnamese have high respect for learning. Vietnam pushed by the pressure of history, constructed its own education system in modern society. Confucian and French systems influenced early Vietnamese education. Some of the advantages and disadvantages of Chinese and French's early education system led later to Vietnam's political and education system to change. For example, Chinese traditional culture made Vietnam develop slowly after the late 19th century. In addition, economics played a large role in Vietnam's education. Vietnamese had the slow development of economy during the French colonial period, and Vietnamese did not have enough money to go to school. On the other hand, with French as the dominant language of instruction during the French Colonization period, because many Vietnamese did not speak French, and this policy caused most of those Vietnamese to lose their literacy.

After France left Vietnam, because of Vietnamese dissatisfaction with life and the collapse of Vietnam, the Vietnamese government encouraged young Vietnamese to learn from school, rather than from their family. However, although the government had noticed the importance of education to the country, and tried to change their education policy, from 1955 to 1975, America, France, and the Soviet Union affected Vietnam's education system. Because of many different influences, Vietnamese's education system could not change or improve immediately, so, the old education system still caused lots of many social problems.

The Vietnam War brought influence on Vietnam's education reform. Because the Vietnam War started, America joined the war. They had tried to change the Vietnam education system. However, France thought that Americans belittled their culture. Afterward, France and the United States' competition started. Ultimately, the compromises of the French let Americans also keep helping the Vietnamese government to re-establish and reform the Vietnam education system after the war. On the other hand, during the Vietnam War and the war damages aggravated the social and economic pressure, and the government did not reestablish the education system. However, with the improvement of economics in Vietnam after 1975, Vietnam's education system had improved. With the new policy in 1986, Doi Moi, Vietnam's education become better and better as time goes by.

France and America's competition, Vietnam, the economic and the education reform, all those elements had profound influences on the development of Vietnam education. Because they pushed Vietnam's extremely long, traditional education system gradually merged with western culture and system step by step, let more Vietnamese have more opportunities to study, contact with different people, countries, and cultures, let Vietnam gradually become an international country.

## 8 CONCLUSION

With time elapsing, people will gradually forget the history and the influence of history. However, people should admit that histories have profound influences on modern society. When I do research, I found a lot of information about how Chinese culture has deeply influenced Vietnamese culture. As time goes by, Vietnam started to contact western culture, and their social system started to change based on east and west culture. So, if anyone wants to know how the Vietnam society changes after western culture was involved in Vietnam. I would like to suggest that to compare which culture, east or west, has bigger influences on Vietnamese's modern society first? That should be a good start.

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