



A DISCUSSION ON EDUCATION IN VIETNAM FROM K. MARX AND F. ENGELS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) were two of the most influential intellectuals in human history. Marx and Engels extensively addressed several societal matters, such as education, through their sharp writings, as they dedicated their lives to the pursuit of liberating the working class and laboring individuals. This dissertation aims to elucidate the viewpoints of these two prominent intellectuals regarding the essence, methodologies, and function of the state in the realm of education. By employing this theoretical framework, the present condition of education in Vietnam will be examined and assessed.

Keywords: Educational thought of Marx and Engels, Vietnamese education, educational reform and innovation

The perspectives of Marx and Engels about the nature, methods of education, and the role of the state

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), Engels acknowledged that children from working-class families encountered greater challenges in their education due to society's failure to adequately educate this particular group, resulting in their exposure to more challenging living conditions. Engels highlighted that the education provided to the offspring of working families was deemed essential and suitable by the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie expressed a lack of desire for workers to receive an education. He stated: "If the bourgeoisie prioritizes the well-being of workers due to their necessity, it is not unexpected that they only provide education to workers that aligns with their own interests." The magnitude of that extent is rather low. (...) The act of providing education to workers yields few financial gains for the bourgeoisie, and conversely, it may engender heightened apprehension among them [1].

In his seminal work, *Capital and The Communist Manifesto*, Marx expounded about the correlation between the essence of education and the prevailing level of material output within society at that era. The nature of education in capitalist society was profoundly shaped by the bourgeois ideology. In society, education was segregated into distinct groups, each assigned certain economic functions. The purpose of education for children belonging to the working class was primarily focused on facilitating their labor in factories, so enabling them to contribute to the economic production of capitalist industrialism. Therefore, it is evident that Marx recognized a significant characteristic of education, namely that education is shaped by and inherently interconnected with the material production level of society.

In addition, Marx recognized and held the belief that education, facilitated by the state apparatus, played a crucial role in the capitalist superstructure. Its primary function was to perpetuate, uphold, and validate class distinctions, inequality, and the accumulation of capital. Marx's perspective on education was consistently included into his examination of capitalism and wage labor, particularly the issue of child labor in bourgeois society. This laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of the neo-Marxist sociology of education.

Marx and Engels identified the characteristics and hierarchical structure of education in bourgeois society. They assigned communists the responsibility of transforming education by tangible measures, aiming to eliminate the utilization of education as a means to perpetuate social inequity. The Manifesto of the Communist Party explicitly articulates this notion. Marx advocated for universal access to education in public schools. The current state of children's factory labor abolition...[2] This observation highlights an additional aspect of education as highlighted by Marx and Engels, namely the imperative for education to be universally accessible through free public education. The realization of such an education is contingent upon the future establishment of a communist society.

Marx not only examined the essence of education but also made reference to the overarching approaches to education. Marx systematically and coherently presents the idea in *Capital*, although he does not explicitly refer to it as the "method of education." He states that later education will enable every child to combine intellectual education, physical education, and productive labor by a certain age. This approach not only serves as a means to enhance societal productivity, but also represents the sole approach to cultivate individuals who possess comprehensive development, a way that has been alluded to from within the machine itself [3]. Marx asserted that an essential approach to education should encompass a synthesis of physical education, intellectual education (knowledge), and material production, specifically through engagement in factory and workshop activity. This approach aims to facilitate experiential learning, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. While expressing criticism towards the exploitation of child labor in textile mills in England or France, Marx maintained that it is necessary for children to acquire knowledge and skills through engaging in work-related tasks. Nevertheless, it is crucial that these forms of labor are suitable for the child's age and that learning be complemented by intervals of relaxation, preventing youngsters from being excessively engrossed in a single task. Marx penned: "In my perspective, education has three fundamental components: One aspect to consider is intellectual education. There are two main components to consider: physical education, encompassing the instruction of gymnastics and military training. The third aspect is technical education, which imparts children and youth with a comprehensive understanding of the fundamental concepts underlying all industrial processes. Additionally, it cultivates the habit of utilizing the most basic tools found in various industries. The escalating intricacy of the instructional content pertaining to intellectual, physical, and technical education necessitates its alignment with the categorization of children and adolescents based on their age. The revenue generated from the sale of the items manufactured by the technical schools should partially offset the expenses incurred by those schools. The integration of intellectual, physical, and technical education, in conjunction with remunerated active employment, has the potential to elevate the socioeconomic status of the working class above that of the middle and upper classes"[4].

The realization of a multidimensional education, encompassing vocational, physical, and intellectual education, necessitates the attainment of political power by the working class. Acquiring democracy is the initial prerequisite for attaining political power. Democracy, in this context, is defined as "a type of government or a type of governance"[5]. Marx posited that once the working class attained political authority and established a distinct class state, and subsequently a non-class state, the segregation of educational content (vocational, physical, intellectual) would cease to exist in schools. This is because the division of labor roles in capitalist society gave rise to the segregation of educational content. The workers exclusively engaged in material production duties, employing physical labor inside factory settings, hence necessitating vocational education as their sole requirement. In a similar vein, the offspring of laboring households received instruction that mostly focused on vocational skills, whereas academic subjects such as mathematics, geometry, and languages, which were deemed impractical for industrial labor, were not imparted. Furthermore, physical education was not accorded significant importance.

Marx made reference to the state's involvement in education while expressing disapproval of the German Social Democratic Party's stance in the Critique of the Gotha Program (1875). The SPD argued that the state should solely serve as a sponsor of education, rather than actively engaging in the educational process. This perspective was deemed detrimental to the perpetuation of capitalist society and the accumulation of capital. The differentiation between the state's position as a supporter of education and its activities as an educator is evident in the subsequent excerpt, which has subsequently been further explored in contemporary perspectives on the state's function.

The provision of public education by the state is highly unacceptable. The utilization of a comprehensive legislation to govern the allocation of funds for public schools, the professional qualifications of educational personnel, the curriculum of subjects taught, and the appointment of state inspectors to oversee the enforcement of these legal provisions, as observed in the United States, represents a notable departure from the notion of designating the state as the sole educator of the populace. Contrarily, it is imperative to eradicate any form of governmental or ecclesiastical influence on educational institutions [6].

In the contemporary context, in order to uphold the principle of universal access to free education, the state assumes a central role as the primary financier of educational endeavors. This is achieved through the establishment of state regulations governing the administration of training programs, examinations, and the accreditation of educational standards. Additionally, the implementation of a standardized national curriculum is undertaken to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all individuals, while simultaneously mitigating and diminishing social disparities among diverse groups.

Marx and Engels primarily concentrated on examining capitalist society in the late 19th century, influenced by the rise of industrial production and the blue-collar working class. Their objective was to emancipate the working class and propose a utopian society - communist society - for the future. Their examination of education was limited to preliminary concepts when assessing the experiences of the working class and their offspring. By analyzing the works of Marx and Engels that address their perspectives on education, the primary arguments regarding education put forth by these two renowned authors can be succinctly described as follows:

Regarding the nature of education, public education refers to education that is accessible to all individuals and provided at no cost. The amount of material production in society, particularly the economic-social ties, has a significant impact on and determines education.

Two important aspects to consider in the context of education are the integration of physical education, intellectual education, and material creation within a comprehensive educational framework. The correlation between education and labor is crucial.

Regarding the role of the state in education, it is imperative that the state assumes the responsibility of sponsoring education rather than directly engaging in its provision.

Vietnam's Education Situation

When comparing Vietnam's education to Marx and Engels' ideas, some key elements stand out: *The nature of education.*

The 2015 UN report on education in Vietnam found that Vietnam has achieved universal primary education and expanded early childhood care and education since 2000. Public primary education is free. Public preschools have inexpensive tuition. Decree 86/2015/ND-CP set preschool and general education tuition fees from 2015-2016 to 2020-2021 by region: urban areas from 60,000 to 300,000 VND/month, rural areas from 30,000 to 120,000 VND/month, and mountainous areas from 8,000 to 60,000 VND/month [7].

Low tuition prices have helped achieve universal primary education and make the country's education system popular. However, impoverished families in rural and mountainous, ethnic minority, and economically disadvantaged communities still struggle with these tuition prices. In light of this, the 2019 Education Law amended and expanded universal and compulsory education up to the lower secondary level: Article 14: Mandatory primary education. The state shall provide universal preschool and lower secondary education for 5-year-olds"[8]; & "Article 27: The State has policies to invest in developing preschool education; give priority to developing preschool education in mountainous areas, islands, ethnic minority areas, areas with particularly difficult socio-economic conditions, and industrial zones" [9]. The 2019 Education Law mandates that all children have the right to education, and this step affirms the nature of the Vietnamese education system: "Article 3: The Vietnamese education system is a socialist education system with popular, national, scientific, modern characteristics, taking Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought as the foundation"[10].

Furthermore, beginning in 1986, the Doi Moi (Renovation) period witnessed the official inclusion of private institutions, encompassing both domestic and international educational organizations, within the national education system. This inclusion was facilitated through the establishment of private and semi-public schools at all levels. The phenomenon of private involvement in the education system is commonly referred to as the socialization of education, which is explicitly governed by legislative instruments such as papers, resolutions, and decrees. Resolution 90/CP/1997 [11] or Decree 73/1999/ND-CP [12] There exist instances that demonstrate the state's promotion of private entities' involvement in the education system. Request for Resolution 35/NQ-CP/2019 [13] In 2018, there were 2,955 private educational institutions, which constituted 6.68% of the total 44,000 educational institutions in the country. A total of 1.3 million students, about 6% of the whole student population of 22.5 million, were pursuing their education at private educational institutions. The proliferation of private educational institutions has played a significant role in enhancing the range of educational options available to Vietnamese families. Furthermore, under the framework of our nation's

accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), we have made a firm commitment to enact the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) throughout all 12 service sectors, encompassing the realm of education [14]. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are the primary regions in Vietnam that exhibit the highest concentration of foreign investment projects in the field of education. The majority of these projects are implemented through the establishment of new private or bilingual schools that adhere to international standards, or by providing financial support to domestic private educational institutions that are experiencing significant growth. Therefore, education has evolved from being solely a public social welfare to being a commercial service that adheres to market principles. It now functions as a commodity, providing additional resources to supplement the limited capacity of the public education system.

Regarding the techniques of education.

The Vietnamese Education Reform Program of 2006, also known as the 2006 General Education Program, was implemented subsequent to the enactment of the 2005 Education Law. Its primary objective was to cultivate and enhance the knowledge and skills of students across all three educational levels (primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary). The program primarily relied on summative assessment methods, including end-of-subject, mid-term, and end-of-term exams, as the principal means of testing and evaluation. Simultaneously, the program delineated the educational goals for every phase of education, the requisite competencies or output criteria of the pedagogical process (encompassing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students must attain), instructional content, instructional materials, and methodologies for assessing and appraising the educational outcomes of both educators and learners.

The Education Development Strategies for 2001-2010 and 2011-2020 have recognized the significant accomplishments of the education system resulting from the execution of a cohesive national education program. Nevertheless, in light of the ramifications of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, Vietnam's education system is confronted with both prospects and obstacles in its pursuit of enhancement and alignment with societal, parental, and student demands. The 2018 General Education Program can be viewed as a document that establishes the groundwork for significant transformations in content, nature, and teaching methods, in response to the worldwide shift towards competency-based education. The previous educational paradigm placed significant emphasis on the knowledge content that teachers were responsible for imparting to students within the general education program. However, in the 2018 education program, knowledge has been recognized as one of the three fundamental pillars (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that schools must cultivate for learners. These three pillars have an equal impact on the development and formation of a versatile student for the modern day.

Based on this novel educational perspective, it is imperative to modify all other educational procedures in order to align with the most suitable approach. In the conventional paradigm, the primary pedagogical approaches encompassed lectures, presentations, and didactic instruction. These strategies prioritize the teacher's role and expertise while underestimating students' capacity for autonomous reasoning and thinking. The new general education program necessitates the implementation of active teaching and learning strategies to foster open and adaptable thinking among both educators and learners. These methodologies necessitate educators to engage in self-directed learning and enhance their proficiency, encompassing not

only their knowledge but also their "soft" competencies, such as information technology utilization, adaptability to contemporary changes, work aptitude, and unwavering creativity, in order to remain adaptable in novel pedagogical approaches and subject matter.

Furthermore, the implementation of contemporary pedagogical approaches necessitates the authentic integration of theoretical knowledge with practical exercises in order to effectively cultivate, enhance, assess, and appraise students' proficiencies. Emerging fields such as STEM and STEAM, which involve the integration of science, mathematics, engineering, crafts, and art, have engendered a novel understanding of disciplines that possess a strong emphasis on practicality and vocationality. This initiative by the education sector can be seen as an attempt to enhance accessibility to vocational subjects that are directly relevant to and cater to material production industries. The aim is to cultivate a pool of highly skilled engineers and workers who can contribute to the growth of domestic industries. According to Marx and Engels, educational content should not be separate from labor, but rather integrated with it. The 2018 General Education Program is anticipated to bring about a significant transformation in the education sector, resulting in a profound and complete overhaul of education and training. It aims to cultivate top-notch human resources and effectively attract and utilize talented individuals [15].

Regarding the state's involvement in education.

The socialist education system of Vietnam, with the state as a sponsor for education activities, ensures the popular and socially equitable nature of the education system through legal documents, decrees, and circulars that outline specific responsibilities and obligations. Additionally, the total public expenditure on education over the years is a clear manifestation of this system. Data indicates a consistent upward trend in the allocation of state budget funds towards education from 2010 to 2014. However, there were variations in the annual education budget, with the proportion ranging from 90% to 91.7% from 2011 to 2016 [16].

In terms of educational attainment, it is evident that the allocation of the state budget for primary and lower secondary education constituted the largest part and shown minimal variation over time, amounting to 29% and 23% respectively in the year 2016 [17], there is an allocation of funds towards preschool education. The allocation of funds towards higher education constituted a reasonable proportion ranging from 8% to 10% during the period from 2011 to 2016. Vocational education exhibited the lowest level of expenditure, displaying a downward trend from 9% to 5% throughout the period spanning from 2011 to 2016. Based on an analysis of state budget expenditure statistics spanning from 2011 to 2016, it is evident that the government has consistently prioritized primary and lower secondary education as a means to achieve universal education for all individuals. This emphasis is particularly evident in the allocation of human resources, as evidenced by the allocation of teacher salaries and allowances.

In addition to the aforementioned, Decree 135/2018/ND-CP[18] and Decree 86/2018/ND-CP, issued on 06-6-2018, pertain to the subject of international collaboration and investment in the field of education [19] have established a more advantageous legal pathway with increased incentives, so enabling the entry of foreign investors into Vietnam's education industry. According to Decree 135, there has been a streamlining of legal and operational prerequisites, as well as a reduction in administrative processes. Decree 86 aims to mitigate personnel demands and enhance the quota for the admission of Vietnamese students, thereby facilitating

the augmentation of the proportion of Vietnamese students pursuing foreign education programs. Specifically, it seeks to limit the proportion of Vietnamese students studying foreign education programs to a maximum of 10% at the primary and lower secondary levels, 20% at the upper secondary level, and a maximum of 50% for preschool and compulsory education institutions. These modifications demonstrate the genuine appreciation of the Party and State for the involvement of international educational institutions in Vietnam's education sector.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the involvement of private entities and foreign investment initiatives in the field of education may give rise to certain drawbacks for marginalized populations, particularly children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (including those residing in rural and urban areas) and migrant workers residing in urban areas. These groups are significantly impacted by social stratification. Furthermore, the matter of quality control pertaining to private educational institutions necessitates attention within the framework of the swiftly expanding private education sector in our nation. Many schools, which are also firms operating under the Enterprise Law and Investment Law, may engage in excessive or deceptive advertising of their "educational" products in order to sell them. The current approach to education administration predominantly focuses on administrative records generated by schools, so facilitating the occurrence of the "hanging a deer's head but selling dog meat" issue, which often goes unnoticed by parents and students. This phenomenon has the potential to result in an uneven and precarious level of educational achievement across successive cohorts of pupils. To achieve the goal of comprehensively developing Vietnamese people with ethics, knowledge, culture, health, aesthetics, and vocation, as well as qualities, competencies, and civic consciousness, it is necessary to enhance the state's management role in the education sector. This will also foster patriotism, national spirit, loyalty to the ideals of national independence and socialism, and the development of individual potential and creativity. Additionally, it is important to raise intelligence, develop human resources, and foster talents to meet the requirements of building, defending the Fatherland, and international integration [20].

Consequently, following an extended duration of persistent endeavors to reform and reinvent the domestic education system, numerous noteworthy accomplishments have been attained. This observation indicates that the fundamental ideas put out by Marx and Engels have been partially manifested in the educational and training standards and policies of the Party and State. Nevertheless, in order to align with the realistic circumstances of Vietnam's socio-economic progress, their arguments have been implemented with adaptability, taking into account the country's actual conditions. However, education and training still need to make significant progress in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of their changes. This will help establish trust among students and parents regarding an education system that is genuinely aligned with the country's development needs, advancements in science, technology, and society. Additionally, it should be suitable for the Vietnamese people and culture, as well as the nation's traditional values and the common values of humanity [21].

Nevertheless, it is imperative that we persist in strengthening the state's involvement in overseeing the quality of education to guarantee the long-term growth of the education industry. There are several issues that require addressing, namely:

To begin with, it is imperative to enhance inspection and monitoring methods beyond the only reliance on administrative reports provided by educational institutions. It is imperative to

advocate for the promotion of independent quality accreditation by esteemed international organizations across all educational institutions, encompassing both public and private entities. This measure will provide transparency and impose stringent penalties on any institution that engages in fraudulent activities or breaches regulations.

Furthermore, implementing explicit and stringent guidelines on the promotion and distribution of educational services. The rigorous prohibition of false advertising with the intention of deceiving parents and pupils is imperative. It is imperative that all assertions on the quality and effects of education are supported by authoritative statistics derived from recognized third-party reviews.

Furthermore, it is imperative for the government to do thorough research and establish efficient systems to facilitate educational opportunities for marginalized populations, including individuals living in poverty, ethnic minorities, and the offspring of migrant workers. These groups may face obstacles when private investment in education is heightened. Examples of such measures may encompass needs-based financial aid policies and preferred admission quotas.

Furthermore, it is crucial for curriculum development to prioritize the enhancement of STEM/STEAM integration in order to adequately equip the upcoming workforce for contemporary production and economic circumstances. This approach aligns with Marx and Engels' ideal of integrating intellectual endeavors with technical vocational training and practical implementation.

Vietnam's education system has achieved significant strides in implementing the core principles of Marx and Engels about the nature, methods, and role of the state in education, thanks to ongoing reform initiatives in recent years. Nevertheless, in order to genuinely attain global benchmarks, further extensive changes are required, particularly in the realm of quality assurance overseen by an enhanced state role. Under appropriate guidance, the education system in Vietnam has the potential to effectively cultivate contemporary socialist individuals who possess robust ethical values, extensive knowledge, proficient abilities, and innovative thinking, hence propelling the nation's sustainable socio-economic progress.

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