



# An Analysis Of The Present Condition Of Education In Vietnam From The Viewpoints Of K. Marx And F. Engels

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**Citation:** Thuy Van Dinh et al. (2024), An Analysis Of The Present Condition Of Education In Vietnam From The Viewpoints Of K. Marx And F. Engels, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 30(4), 1233-1238, Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i4.1641

## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) were two of the most influential intellectuals in human history. Marx and Engels, dedicated to the cause of emancipating the working class and working individuals, extensively addressed various social matters, including education, using their writing instruments. This essay aims to elucidate the viewpoints of these two prominent intellectuals regarding the essence, approaches, and the government's involvement in education. It use this as a theoretical framework to examine and evaluate the present condition of education in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Educational thought of Marx and Engels, education in Vietnam, educational reform and innovation

## The perspectives of Marx and Engels about the essence, approaches, and governmental involvement in education

In his work titled "The Condition of the Working Class in England" (1845), Engels explores the concept of education and highlights the challenging living conditions experienced by workers. He observes that children from working-class backgrounds encounter a greater number of societal temptations compared to their peers, primarily due to society's lack of concern for the education of this particular group. Engels highlighted that the education provided to the offspring of working families was deemed essential and suitable by the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the bourgeoisie opposed the education of the workers. The author asserts that if the bourgeoisie prioritizes the well-being of the worker due to its necessity for their own interests, it is unsurprising that they selectively provide education to the worker in a manner that aligns with their own goals. The magnitude of that extent is rather low. (...) Providing education to the worker yields minimal advantages for the capitalist class, and conversely, it can exacerbate their apprehension [1].

In Capital and The Communist Manifesto, Marx expounded upon the correlation between the characteristics of education and the societal dynamics prevalent during that era. The bourgeoisie's ideology has a profound impact on the character of education in capitalist society. Education was segregated based on social status, with each class assuming distinct economic functions. The primary purpose of education for children belonging to the working class should be limited to their duty as laborers in factories, thereby facilitating their economic production within the framework of capitalist industrialism. Hence, it is evident that Marx has highlighted a significant attribute of education, namely, its inherent connection to and correlation with the material production level within a given society.

Furthermore, Marx acknowledged and held the belief that education, facilitated by the state apparatus, played a crucial role within the capitalist superstructure. Its primary function was to perpetuate, uphold, and validate the division of social classes, inequality, and the accumulation of capital. Marx's perspective on education was incorporated 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, upon acknowledging the inherent characteristics and hierarchical structure of education within bourgeois society, assigned communists the responsibility of effecting a transformative shift in the nature of education through tangible measures. Their objective was to eradicate the utilization of education as a means to perpetuate social inequity. The statement made by Marx in The Communist Manifesto explicitly emphasizes the importance of providing free education to all children and advocating for the abolition of child labor in contemporary factory settings. Integration of teaching and manufacturing...[2] This observation

highlights an additional attribute of education as outlined by Marx and Engels, namely the imperative for education to be universally accessible and provided at no cost to all individuals. The realization of such an education is contingent upon the future establishment of a communist society.

In addition to examining the essence of education, Marx also dealt with teaching methodologies in a broader sense. While not explicitly referred to as the "teaching method," Marx effectively conveyed this concept in his work *Capital*. He stated that in the future, education will integrate intellectual, physical, and productive labor for all children beyond a certain age. This approach serves as both a means to enhance societal productivity and the sole means to cultivate individuals who have reached a state of complete development. Notably, this method has originated from the machinery itself [3]. Marx asserted that an essential pedagogical approach should encompass a synthesis of physical education, intellectual education (knowledge), and material production, particularly the engagement in factory and workshop labor to facilitate experiential learning, so establishing a connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application and vocational training. While expressing criticism towards the utilization of child labor in textile mills in England or France, Marx maintained his belief that children should acquire knowledge and skills within a structured framework of employment. Nevertheless, it is crucial that these forms of labor are suitable for every age cohort, and the process of acquiring knowledge should be supplemented with intervals of relaxation, ensuring that youngsters are not excessively engrossed in a single task. Marx penned: According to my comprehension, education comprises three distinct components: Firstly, intellectual education. Furthermore, physical education include the instruction of gymnastics and military training. Thirdly, technical education plays a crucial role in equipping children and adolescents with a comprehensive understanding of fundamental principles underlying various production processes. It also fosters the cultivation of a habitual utilization of rudimentary instruments across all sectors of production. The adaptation of intellectual, physical, and technical education to the age classification of children and adolescents is necessary due to the progressively escalating complexity of these domains. The revenue generated from the sale of products manufactured in technical schools should partially offset the expenses incurred by the school. By integrating intellectual, physical, and technical education alongside remunerated productive activity, it is possible to elevate the socioeconomic status of the working class above that of the middle and upper classes [4].

The realization of a multidimensional education system, encompassing industrial, physical, and intellectual education, necessitates the acquisition of political power by the working class. Attaining democracy was the initial prerequisite for attaining political authority. Democracy, in this context, was defined as "a type of government or a system of governance" [5]. According to Marx, the emergence of a working class that attains political power and establishes a distinct class state, as well as a non-class state, would result in the elimination of the segregated educational content (industrial, physical, intellectual) within schools. This separation is believed to have originated from the division of labor roles within capitalist society. The worker solely engaged in the activity of material production, employing manual labor inside factory settings, hence necessitating a focus on acquiring industrial skills. The offspring of employed households exhibited a commonality - they were solely required to acquire skills that were applicable to their labor, while subjects such as mathematics, geometry, and language, which were not applicable to factory work, were not imparted. Furthermore, physical education was also deemed insignificant.

In his critique of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), Marx made reference to the state's involvement in education. He contended that the state should assume the role of a mere patron of education, rather than a direct educator.

Marx argued that such a role would foster the perpetuation of bourgeois society and the accumulation of capital. The differentiation between the state's position as a supporter of education and its actions as an instructor is explicitly conveyed in the subsequent passage, which was then expanded upon in the analysis of the contemporary state's function: "A state-funded education system for the people" is completely unacceptable. Establishing a comprehensive legislation to allocate resources to public schools, enforce mandatory school attendance, determine curricula, and oversee them through state inspectors, as is the case in the United States, differs significantly from designating the state as the primary educator of the population. On the contrary, the targeted outcome is the complete cessation of government and church influence in the educational institution [6].

Marx and Engels primarily focused on analyzing capitalist society and presenting an ideal communist society for the future, influenced by the historical context of the late 19th century with the emergence of industrial production and the blue-collar working class. When examining the lives of the working class and their children, their understanding of education only encompassed the initial concepts. By analyzing several works that explore Marx and Engels' perspectives on education, the primary points put forth by these two renowned authors can be succinctly described as follows:

Firstly, on the essence of education: Public education refers to the provision of education to all individuals without charge. The educational system is shaped and impacted by the particular level of material production within a society, with particular emphasis on economic and social dynamics.

Additionally, with regards to pedagogical approaches, it is imperative that comprehensive education integrates physical education, intellectual education (knowledge acquisition), and material production. The correlation between education and labor is crucial.

Thirdly, on the state's involvement in education: It is imperative that the state assumes the role of a patron of education, rather than engaging in direct educational activities.

### **In relation to the present condition of education in Vietnam**

Based on the aforementioned content pertaining to Marx and Engels' perspectives on education, an examination of the present condition of education in Vietnam reveals some noteworthy observations.

#### *Regarding the essence of education.*

Based on the 2015 report published by the United Nations regarding education in Vietnam [7], Since the year 2000, Vietnam has successfully attained the objective of implementing universal primary education and enhancing preschool childcare services. At the primary level, public education is provided without charge. Public preschools have comparatively affordable tuition fees. The tuition fee framework for preschool, primary, and secondary education from the 2015-2016 to 2020-2021 school years is regulated by Decree 86/2015/ND-CP. The framework is categorized by region as follows: urban areas have a monthly tuition fee range of VND 60,000 - 300,000, rural areas have a monthly tuition fee range of VND 30,000 - 120,000, and mountainous areas have a monthly tuition fee range of VND 8,000 - 60,000 [8]. The comparatively affordable tuition fees play a significant role in attaining the objective of providing elementary education to all and guaranteeing the public character of the nation's education system. Nevertheless, these tuition fees continue to provide challenges for impoverished households residing in rural and hilly regions, ethnic minority communities, and areas with exceptionally challenging economic circumstances. The 2019 Education Law made necessary modifications and additions to the mandate for universal and mandatory education up to the lower secondary level, in response to the prevailing circumstances.

Article 14 stipulates that primary education is obligatory. Universal preschool education for 5-year-old children and universal lower secondary education shall be implemented by the State [9]; Furthermore, "Article 27: The State has implemented policies to allocate resources towards the advancement of preschool education, with a particular focus on mountainous regions, islands, ethnic minority areas, areas facing significant socio-economic challenges, and industrial zones" [10]. This measure aims to guarantee the entitlement to education for children across all demographic categories within the realm of education, while also reaffirming the characteristics of the Vietnamese education system as delineated in the Education Law of 2019. In accordance with Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's Thought, the Vietnamese education system can be characterized as a socialist education system that encompasses popular, national, scientific, and modern elements [11].

Furthermore, commencing from the Doi Moi (Renovation) era in 1986, the national education system has granted official permission for private persons and organizations, both domestic and international, to engage in the establishment of private and semi-public schools throughout all educational tiers. The involvement of the private sector in the education system is sometimes referred to as the socialization of education, which is explicitly governed by legal instruments such as documents, resolutions, and decrees. Article 90/CP/1997 [12] or Decree 73/1999/ND-CP [13] are instances illustrating the state's promotion of private sector involvement in the education system.

Resolution 35/NQ-CP/2019 [14] In 2018, there were 2,955 private educational institutions, which constituted 6.68% of the total 44,000 educational institutions in the country. Private educational organizations cater to 1.3 million students and children, or 6% of the overall student population of 22.5 million. The proliferation of private educational institutions has played a significant role in expanding the range of educational options available to Vietnamese families. In addition, Vietnam has pledged to adopt the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for all 12 service sectors, including education, as part of its membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) [15]. 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 initiatives are implemented through the establishment of newly formed international standard integrated schools, bilingual private schools, or collaborative partnerships with established domestic private educational institutions. Consequently, education has evolved from being just a public social welfare to becoming a commercial service that adheres to market laws. It now functions as a commodity, providing additional resources to address difficulties that the public education system cannot address immediately.

#### *Regarding pedagogical approaches.*

The 2006 Vietnamese Education Reform Program, also known as the 2006 General Education Program, was initiated 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, namely primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary. The primary method of assessment employed during this program was summative evaluation, encompassing end-of-term, mid-term, and final examinations. Simultaneously, the program delineated educational objectives for every stage of education, the prescribed outcomes or output criteria of the instructional and learning process (encompassing the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes of students), instructional and learning materials, as well as methodologies for evaluating the instructional and learning outcomes of both educators and learners. The implementation of a cohesive national education program has yielded significant accomplishments for the education system, as recognized by the Education Development Strategies of 2001-2010 and 2011-2020.

Nevertheless, Vietnam's education system is currently encountering both prospects and obstacles in order to enhance itself and satisfy the demands of society, parents, and students, as a result of the 4th Industrial

Revolution. The 2018 General Education Program can be viewed as a document that establishes the groundwork for significant transformations in educational content, nature, and methods, in response to the worldwide shift towards competency-based education. In the past, the primary focus of the general education program was the knowledge content that teachers were responsible for teaching students. However, in the 2018 education program, knowledge is now recognized as one of the three fundamental aspects (knowledge - skills - attitudes) that schools must cultivate for learners. These three pillars have a comparable significance in the development and cultivation of a comprehensive student in the contemporary day. Based on this novel perspective on education, it is imperative to modify all other educational procedures in order to align with the most suitable approach. More precisely, in the conventional perspective, instructional approaches mostly consisted of lectures and presentations, prioritizing the teacher's position and expertise while undervaluing students' capacity for autonomous reasoning and critical 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 utilizing information technology, adapting to the evolving landscape of the new era, honing their work skills, and fostering a perpetual sense of creativity to effectively adapt to novel teaching and learning approaches and subject matter. Furthermore, the novel pedagogical approach 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 encompass the integration of science, mathematics, engineering, handicrafts, and art, have also engendered novel perspectives on subjects that are extremely pragmatic and applicable to various industries. This initiative can be interpreted as an endeavor by the education sector to enhance accessibility to industrial disciplines that are directly associated with and contribute to material production. The aim is to cultivate a cohort of exceptionally skilled engineers and workers for domestic industries. According to the vision of Marx and Engels, it is imperative that educational content and labor be interconnected and should not be treated as distinct entities. The 2018 General Education Program is anticipated to bring about a substantial transformation in the education sector, resulting in a profound and all-encompassing overhaul of education and training, the cultivation of exceptional human resources, and the attraction and appreciation of talented individuals [16].

#### *Regarding the role of the state in education.*

The socialist education system of Vietnam not only guarantees the popular and socially fair nature of the education system through laws, decrees, and guiding circulars that outline the responsibilities and obligations of educational institutions, but it is also evident in the overall public expenditure on education over time. According to statistical data, there was a consistent upward trend in the allocation of state budget funds towards education between 2010 and 2014. However, there were annual fluctuations seen, with the state budget for education experiencing an increase from 90% to 91.7% between 2011 and 2016 [17].

In terms of educational attainment, it is evident that the allocation of the state budget for primary and lower secondary education has consistently held the largest part, amounting to 29% and 23% respectively in the year 2016 [18], allocating funds for preschool education. The allocation of funds towards higher education constituted a moderate percentage, ranging from 8% to 10% within the time frame spanning from 2011 to 2016. The vocational education sector experienced a progressive decline in expenditure, with a decrease from 9% to 5% throughout the period of 2011-2016. Based on an analysis of state budget expenditure statistics spanning from 2011 to 2016, it is evident that the government has placed significant emphasis on primary and lower secondary education as a means to achieve universal public education. This prioritization is particularly evident in the allocation of human resources, as evidenced by the substantial expenditure on teacher salaries and allowances.

Along with that, Decree No. 135/2018/ND-CP [19] and Decree No. 86/2018/ND-CP dated June 6, 2018, regulating foreign cooperation and investment in education [20] have created a favorable legal framework with more incentives, facilitating foreign investors to enter the education sector in Vietnam. Decree 135 simplified legal, operational, and administrative requirements and procedures. Decree 86 reduced personnel requirements and increased the enrollment limit for Vietnamese students, allowing an increase in the proportion of Vietnamese students studying foreign education programs from not exceeding 10% at the primary and lower secondary levels, and 20% at the upper secondary level, to not exceeding 50% for preschool and compulsory education institutions. These adjustments show that the Party and State truly value international educational organizations participating in Vietnam's education market.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the involvement of private entities and foreign investment initiatives in the field of education can potentially result in adverse consequences for marginalized populations, particularly children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (including those living in rural and urban areas) and migrant workers residing in urban areas. These groups are significantly impacted by social stratification. Furthermore, the matter of regulating the educational caliber of private educational establishments necessitates attention within the framework of the robust advancement of private education in our nation. Many schools, which are also firms operating under the Enterprise Law and Investment Law, may engage in excessive or misleading advertising of their educational products in order to promote their products. The current approach to education administration predominantly focuses on administrative records generated

by schools, so facilitating the occurrence of the phenomena commonly referred to as "hanging a deer's head but selling dog meat," which often goes unnoticed by parents or students. This has the potential to result in an uneven and precarious educational standard among successive cohorts of students. To achieve the goal of comprehensively developing Vietnamese people with ethics, knowledge, culture, health, aesthetics, and vocation, as well as qualities, capabilities, and civic consciousness, it is necessary to enhance the state's management role in the education sector. This will also foster patriotism, national spirit, and loyalty to the ideals of national independence and socialism. Additionally, it is important to promote each individual's potential and creativity, raise intellectual standards, develop human resources, and foster talents to meet the requirements of national construction, defense, and international integration [21].

Consequently, following an extended duration of persistent endeavors to reform and reinvent the domestic education system, notable 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 prevailing socio-economic development conditions of the nation, their assertions have been implemented with adaptability and suitability to the specific circumstances of Vietnam. However, there is still much progress to be made in education and training to demonstrate the effectiveness of their changes. This will help students and parents gain confidence in an education system that is aligned with the country's development needs, the advancements in science, technology, and society of the era. It should also be suitable for Vietnamese people and culture, the nation's traditions, and universal human values [22].

Vietnam's education sector has made significant progress in implementing Marx and Engels' ideas on the nature, methods, and state's role in education. This has been achieved through continuous efforts and notable achievements in educational reform. The implementation has been flexible and tailored to the specific conditions of the country. Vietnam has effectively ensured universal access to public and free education by implementing legislation that eliminate tuition fees, particularly for marginalized populations. In response to the varied educational needs of the population, private education has emerged as a complementary option to public education.

The 2018 General Education Program has initially incorporated concepts of integrating intellectual, physical, and technological education to cultivate well-rounded human resources that can effectively address socio-economic development requirements. Nevertheless, it is important to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the program's efficacy in practical settings.

In relation to the involvement of the state in education, Vietnam has reaffirmed its status as the principal financier and overseer of the public education system through legal instruments, while also placing emphasis on allocating state funds towards achieving universal education standards. Simultaneously, measures and regulations have been implemented to promote the growth of private education and entice foreign investment in education to complement the public sector. Nevertheless, it is imperative to adequately tackle concerns pertaining to equity and the assurance of quality in private education.

To summarize, there is still potential for enhancing the renovation and development trajectory of Vietnam's education system in order to align with the established objectives and criteria. The sustained growth of the national education system in the future necessitates the incorporation and strategic application of the core principles of Marxism-Leninism to education, taking into account the specific circumstances of the country.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, Vietnam's education sector has made significant progress in conforming to Marx and Engels' perspectives on the characteristics, approaches, and function of the state in education, while also adjusting these concepts to suit Vietnam's unique circumstances and circumstances.

In relation to the essence of education, the objective of providing public, cost-free education to all individuals has predominantly been accomplished through the implementation of legislation pertaining to tuition exemptions, particularly targeting marginalized populations. The emergence of private education has additionally contributed to the expansion of public education in order to address a wide range of educational needs.

The 2018 General Education Program demonstrates an initial attempt to integrate intellectual, physical, and technical/vocational education in order to cultivate individuals with comprehensive skills that are in line with the requirements of socio-economic development. However, additional assessment is required to determine its efficacy.

Vietnam has expressed its commitment to the socialist state's role as the principal financier and overseer of the public education system. This commitment is evident via the establishment of legal frameworks and the prioritizing of state budget allocation towards achieving universal education standards. Concurrently, measures and regulations have been implemented to promote the growth of private education and attract foreign investment to complement public education. Nevertheless, it is imperative to address the concerns pertaining to equality and quality assurance in the realm of private education.

In conclusion, although significant advancements have been achieved, there remains scope for further enhancement in Vietnam's educational growth trajectory in order to effectively align with stated objectives and prerequisites. It is crucial to incorporate and apply essential Marxist-Leninist ideas on education, tailored to



the specific circumstances of the country, in order to ensure the long-term growth and effectiveness of the national education system.

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