

## VIETNAM'S COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL REFORM: REFLECTIONS AFTER A DECADE OF IMPLEMENTATION (2013–2024)

*A REFORMA EDUCACIONAL ABRANGENTE DO VIETNÃ: REFLEXÕES APÓS  
UMA DÉCADA DE IMPLEMENTAÇÃO (2013–2024)*

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study evaluates the progress of Vietnam's educational reform, initiated under Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW in 2013, which aimed to align the nation's education system with socio-economic objectives such as industrialization, modernization, and global integration. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analyses, the research examines achievements, challenges, and limitations across key areas such as learner-centered education, digital transformation, teacher development, and internationalization. Significant progress has been observed, including the universalization of preschool education, improvements in teacher qualifications, and the integration of digital tools, positioning Vietnam as a regional leader in education. However, challenges remain, including insufficient preparation of financial and human resources, inconsistent policy implementation, and the lack of a cohesive educational philosophy. Persistent inequities, outdated teaching methodologies, and limited alignment with labor market demands further constrain reform efforts. The findings emphasize the importance of targeted investments in teacher training, infrastructure, and governance, alongside fostering stronger international partnerships. This study highlights Vietnam's potential to establish a globally competitive education system and provides actionable recommendations for addressing systemic barriers. The results contribute to global discussions on educational reform in developing nations, offering lessons for sustainable and equitable transformation.

**Keywords:** Education Reform, Teacher Quality, Industrialization, International Integration, Vietnam.

## RESUMO

Este estudo avalia o progresso da reforma educacional do Vietnã, iniciada sob a Resolução nº 29-NQ/TW em 2013, que visava alinhar o sistema educacional do país com objetivos socioeconômicos como industrialização, modernização e integração global. Usando uma abordagem de métodos mistos que combina análises quantitativas e qualitativas, a pesquisa examina conquistas, desafios e limitações em áreas-chave como educação centrada no aluno, transformação digital, desenvolvimento de professores e internacionalização. Progresso significativo foi observado, incluindo a universalização da educação pré-escolar, melhorias nas qualificações de professores e a integração de ferramentas digitais, posicionando o Vietnã como um líder regional em educação. No entanto, os desafios permanecem, incluindo preparação insuficiente de recursos financeiros e humanos, implementação de políticas inconsistentes e a falta de uma filosofia educacional coesa. Desigualdades persistentes, metodologias de ensino desatualizadas e alinhamento limitado com as demandas do mercado de trabalho restringem ainda mais os esforços de reforma. As descobertas enfatizam a importância de investimentos direcionados em treinamento de professores, infraestrutura e governança, além de promover parcerias internacionais mais fortes. Este estudo destaca o potencial do Vietnã para estabelecer um sistema educacional globalmente competitivo e fornece recomendações acionáveis para abordar barreiras sistêmicas. Os resultados contribuem para discussões globais sobre reforma educacional em nações em desenvolvimento, oferecendo lições para transformação sustentável e equitativa.

**Palavras-chave:** Reforma Educacional, Qualidade dos Professores, Industrialização, Integração Internacional, Vietname.

## **Introduction**

Education is a cornerstone of national development, particularly for countries like Vietnam striving to recover from the effects of prolonged wars and economic challenges (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024). Recognizing the critical role of human resource development in driving industrialization, modernization, and global integration, Vietnam initiated a transformative educational reform in 2013 under Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW (Anh, 2015; Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Le, 2024; Quang et al., 2024). This comprehensive reform sought to address systemic challenges, including outdated pedagogical practices, resource constraints, and gaps in teacher training and quality.

The reform's objectives were aligned with Vietnam's broader socio-economic goals, aiming to foster learner-centred education (LCE), improve access to high-quality education, and prepare students to meet the demands of a globalized workforce. However, as studies indicate, the implementation of these policies has been hindered by several factors, such as large class sizes, inadequate professional development, and cultural barriers to adopting progressive teaching methodologies

(Anh, 2015; Ho & Dimmock, 2023). At the institutional level, higher education reforms have emphasized internationalization, academic mobility, and research productivity, but challenges like brain drain and uneven development across institutions remain significant (Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2021; Pham-Duc et al., 2022).

This study evaluates the progress of Vietnam's educational reforms over the past decade, analyzing both achievements and limitations. By examining key aspects such as the adoption of LCE, internationalization, and policy impacts, this research identifies gaps in current practices and provides actionable recommendations for sustainable reform. Drawing on lessons from Vietnam's experience, the study contributes to the broader discourse on education policy and reform in developing contexts, offering insights that may guide similar initiatives in other nations.

## Literature Review

Vietnam's education reform, which began over a decade ago, represents a strategic response to the nation's socio-economic transformation and the challenges of globalization. It addresses foundational issues in the education sector while meeting the demands of domestic development and global integration. This review synthesizes existing research on the motivations, achievements, limitations, and challenges of Vietnam's education reform, situating it within the broader context of contemporary educational practices.

The reform's foundations stem from Vietnam's post-war socio-economic recovery and its transition under the Doi Moi policy, which marked a shift towards modernization and industrialization. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) has consistently prioritized education as a cornerstone for national development, emphasizing its role in fostering human capital and reducing poverty (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1996, 2021). Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW (2013) epitomizes the government's commitment to education, setting ambitious goals to overhaul curricula, teaching methods, and management systems (Anh, 2015; Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Quang et al., 2024).

Vietnam's entry into global education dialogues and its integration into Industry 4.0 further catalyzed reform efforts. Studies highlight the government's focus on equipping students with skills necessary for a technology-driven world, including critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy (Huong Giang, 2023; Pham & Van, 2024). The reform reflects not only a national agenda but also Vietnam's alignment with global trends in education modernization.

The reform has led to notable achievements, particularly in access to education and literacy. Vietnam boasts one of the highest literacy rates in Southeast Asia and consistently performs well on international assessments such as PISA (Dang Hieu, 2018). Key reforms include efforts to universalize preschool education, align vocational training with labor market demands, and foster practical and critical thinking skills through curriculum updates (Anh, 2015; Thanh Hang, 2021).

The introduction of the "one curriculum, multiple textbooks" policy represents a significant shift toward contextualized education, allowing schools to select materials that meet local needs. This approach aligns with global best practices in education by promoting flexibility and adaptability (Huong Giang, 2023). Additionally, the emphasis on integrating digital technologies in classrooms reflects Vietnam's proactive approach to bridging the digital divide and preparing students for Industry 4.0 (Pham & Van, 2024).

Despite these achievements, the reform process faces systemic challenges. One of the most prominent issues is the persistent reliance on traditional, teacher-centred pedagogies, which stifles critical thinking and student autonomy. While new curricula and teaching methods have been introduced, their implementation remains uneven due to insufficient teacher training and a lack of classroom resources (Anh, 2015; Ho & Dimmock, 2023). Textbook dependency continues to dominate teaching practices, often limiting the effectiveness of innovative pedagogies.

The "one curriculum, multiple textbooks" policy has also encountered significant obstacles. Discrepancies between textbook sets and high costs for families have raised concerns about equity and accessibility, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Huong Giang, 2023). Furthermore, the

integration of teaching methods, such as problem-solving and experiential learning, has been criticized for inadequate preparation of teachers, resulting in inconsistent outcomes (Anh, 2015; Ho & Dimmock, 2023).

The disconnect between higher education outputs and labor market needs remains another critical issue. Employers frequently report that graduates lack practical skills and are unprepared for the workforce. This highlights the need for stronger collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011; Ha, 2014).

As Vietnam navigates the challenges of Industry 4.0, digital transformation has emerged as a central theme in its education reform. The adoption of digital technologies in classrooms, from virtual learning platforms to ICT-based pedagogy, represents a forward-looking strategy. However, gaps in digital infrastructure and teacher readiness have limited the effectiveness of these initiatives, particularly in rural and remote areas (Pham & Van, 2024).

Moreover, internationalization has become an integral part of Vietnam's educational strategy. As Nguyen (2024) highlights, study-abroad programs and partnerships with foreign universities have bolstered academic quality and global competitiveness. Yet, these efforts are often undermined by issues like brain drain and the difficulty of reintegrating returning scholars into the domestic education system. Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the benefits of internationalization.

While existing studies provide valuable insights into Vietnam's educational reform, several gaps remain. The long-term impacts of these reforms on economic development and social equity are underexplored. Additionally, there is limited research on the effectiveness of localized educational policies in addressing disparities between urban and rural regions. Comparative studies that examine Vietnam's reforms alongside those of other countries with similar socio-economic contexts are also scarce.

This research seeks to bridge these gaps by critically evaluating the progress of Vietnam's education reform over the past decade. It explores the intersection of policy and practice, identifying persistent barriers and proposing actionable

solutions. By synthesizing findings from recent studies, including those by Ho and Dimmock (2023), Anh (2015), and Nguyen (2024), this research offers a comprehensive analysis of Vietnam's education system and its reform trajectory.

Vietnam's education reform is a dynamic and multifaceted process shaped by the interplay of historical, socio-economic, and global factors. While significant progress has been made in access and curriculum modernization, challenges in implementation, equity, and workforce alignment persist. By addressing these issues through targeted investments in teacher training, infrastructure, and localized policies, Vietnam can build an education system that meets the demands of a rapidly changing world. This literature review provides a foundation for further academic discourse and policy development, contributing to the ongoing transformation of education in Vietnam.

## **Methodology**

This study employs an empirical approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The chosen research design is intended to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the achievements, limitations, and challenges of Vietnam's educational reform after more than a decade. This approach aligns closely with the study's objective of offering actionable insights and systemic solutions to improve the reform process.

The research focuses on data provided by the Vietnamese government, including statistical records, policy documents, and reports from educational institutions. It also incorporates perspectives from educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders involved in the reform process.

A variety of materials were used in this study, including government policy documents such as Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW and related education laws, reports and statistical data from the Ministry of Education and Training, and relevant literature on educational reform both nationally and internationally. Analytical tools, such as qualitative coding software and statistical packages, were employed to facilitate data analysis.

The research methodology involved several key steps. First, relevant documents, reports, and statistical data were collected from official government sources, publications, and research studies. These materials were then systematically reviewed to identify key themes, challenges, and trends related to educational reform. Quantitative data were analyzed to evaluate the progress of reforms in areas such as teacher training, infrastructure development, and literacy rates. Qualitative analysis was conducted to explore policy implications and stakeholder perspectives using thematic coding and synthesis. Finally, the findings were compared with international benchmarks to assess Vietnam's progress relative to global education standards.

The data analysis combined both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis included the use of descriptive and inferential statistics to identify trends and assess the outcomes of reform initiatives. Qualitative analysis employed thematic methods to identify patterns and draw conclusions from textual data, such as policy documents and stakeholder reports.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed in this study. As the research relies on publicly available government data and documents, it ensures transparency and compliance with ethical standards. Since no human or animal subjects were involved, there was no need for ethical approvals specific to participant-based research. The study upholds integrity by accurately citing all sources and adhering to rigorous academic practices.

## **Results and Discussions**

### ***1. Drivers and Strategies for Educational Reform in Vietnam***

Education plays a critical role in the development of any country, directly influencing individuals, families, and broader society. In Vietnam, this sector has faced substantial social pressure to meet increasing expectations. Following the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the country transitioned to a democratic education system, distinct from the feudal and colonial systems before 1945 (Le, 2024). Currently, the Communist Party of Vietnam serves as the sole

political and governing entity, formulating all national development strategies, including those related to education.

After the end of the war and the reunification of the country in 1975, Vietnam experienced a severe socio-economic crisis (Fforde & Paine, 2021). In response, the 6th National Congress of the Communist Party in 1986 implemented comprehensive, synchronized, and radical reforms (Huong & Fry, 2004). Within ten years, Vietnam had emerged from the crisis and became a rice-exporting nation by 1996 (Dawe, 2002). The next phase of development required a shift toward industrialization and modernization, with education identified as a top national priority. The Party declared that “Alongside science and technology, education and training are the top national priorities for raising public knowledge, training human resources, and fostering talent” (Pham & Van, 2024).

However, isolated reforms were insufficient to address the lingering effects of Vietnam’s wartime and subsidized education system. Comprehensive and synchronized reform became a necessity, driven by several key factors.

Firstly, industrialization demanded a high-quality workforce. Previous educational reforms in 1950, 1956, and 1979 had been shaped by unique socio-economic conditions during prolonged wartime and subsequent crises. By the mid-1990s, Vietnam faced vastly different challenges, including the need for rapid modernization (Beresford, 2008). Human resources, as products of education, were pivotal to achieving these goals. Without a systemic overhaul, Vietnam risked falling behind globally.

Secondly, Vietnam’s proactive international integration amplified the urgency of reform. In 2006, the country adopted a policy of international economic integration, which expanded into “proactive and positive international integration” by 2011 (Ha, 2014). Effective integration required a workforce equipped to operate in global environments, yet gaps in professionalism, foreign language proficiency, technological expertise, and communication skills hindered progress. Educational reform became essential to creating a generation capable of meeting these demands.

Finally, inherent limitations in Vietnam’s education system necessitated reform. The system lacked connectivity across levels and types of education and



training. It was overly theoretical, disconnected from labor market needs, and relied on outdated teaching methods, primarily one-way knowledge transmission. Examination and evaluation processes were often cumbersome and superficial, while the persistent “achievement disease,” characterized by artificially enhanced statistics, undermined credibility. Addressing these systemic flaws required comprehensive change.

These internal pressures were further amplified by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), which integrates physical, digital, and biological domains to digitize and automate production. Industry 4.0 has profoundly reshaped societal life, work, and human interactions globally. For developing countries like Vietnam, it offers an opportunity to improve their standing in the global economic landscape—if its potential is harnessed effectively. Conversely, failure to adapt risks exacerbating backwardness.

Under the influence of Industry 4.0, specialized knowledge quickly becomes obsolete, while new knowledge and scientific information multiply exponentially. In this digitized environment, education systems must evolve in terms of philosophy, objectives, teaching methods, and learner centrality. Educational reform has thus become a global trend, and Vietnam cannot afford to remain outside this movement. The modern competitive landscape among nations is increasingly defined by the quality of human resources, which in turn reflects the quality of their education systems. Strong education systems provide a foundation for national development, while weak ones cause countries to fall behind.

In light of these challenges, the Communist Party of Vietnam adopted Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW in 2013 (Anh, 2015; Ho & Dimmock, 2023; Quang et al., 2024). This resolution marked a revolutionary shift in education and training, aiming to meet the demands of industrialization, modernization, and international integration. The reform sought to move beyond imparting knowledge to fostering the comprehensive development of learners’ qualities and capacities.

The resolution influenced all aspects of education, from curriculum content to teaching methods and assessment approaches. The Ministry of Education and Training defined “input” and “output” standards for each education level, subject,

curriculum, discipline, and specialization. Educational programs were streamlined to focus on modern, practical, and standardized content, emphasizing real-world application, increased physical education, foreign language skills, and IT competencies.

Curriculum reform also included revising all general education textbooks to ensure diversity, updated knowledge, and alignment with the needs of each education level and target audience. Teaching methods shifted toward a “learner-centered” approach, fostering active participation and critical thinking. Simultaneously, examination and assessment processes were reformed to emphasize substance over form, becoming more streamlined yet meaningful.

The educational reform, as outlined in Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, was envisioned as a transformative initiative—a “push” to invigorate Vietnam’s education system and set it on a new course. However, as reforms progress, they reveal a mix of achievements and limitations, alongside several persistent challenges that must be addressed to realize the reform’s full potential.

By setting education as a cornerstone of its national development strategy, Vietnam underscores its commitment to becoming a developed nation by 2045. These efforts not only shape the country’s future but also offer valuable lessons for other developing nations facing similar challenges.

## ***2. Vietnam’s Education System After a Decade of Reform***

Over the past decade, Vietnam has embarked on a comprehensive journey to reform its education system, driven by an acute recognition of the sector’s foundational role in national development. Guided by ambitious policies such as the Higher Education Law (2018) and the Education Law (2019), these reforms have aimed to modernize Vietnam’s education system, align it with international standards, and address its longstanding structural inefficiencies. However, while progress has been notable, the pace of change has exposed critical gaps and persistent challenges that must be addressed to sustain momentum and maximize the transformative potential of these efforts. This analysis critically examines

Vietnam's educational reforms, highlighting their successes, shortcomings, and the systemic factors underlying these outcomes.

### **Achievements of educational reform**

Vietnam's education reform initiatives have delivered substantial accomplishments over the past decade, particularly in expanding access, strengthening legal frameworks, and advancing institutional autonomy. Starting from a low baseline amidst socio-economic challenges, these reforms have achieved milestones that stand out among developing nations.

*Legal and Policy Advancements.* One of the most significant achievements has been the establishment of a robust legal framework for education. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) successfully proposed and secured the National Assembly's approval for two landmark laws: the Higher Education Law (2018) and the Education Law (2019). These laws, along with complementary sub-law documents, have comprehensively addressed various educational and training activities, enabling decentralized administration and increasing institutional autonomy while ensuring greater accountability (Pham-Duc et al., 2022). This legal framework has provided a solid foundation for long-term educational reform, transforming management and governance across schools and universities.

*Expanded Access and Equity.* Vietnam has made remarkable strides in expanding access to education and improving equity. Literacy rates for individuals over 16 years old now exceed 97%, and universal preschool education for five-year-old children has been achieved across all 63 provinces and cities, compared to only 18 provinces in the 2013–2014 academic year (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1996). This universalization has been supported by policy measures such as tuition waivers and financial aid for families accessing non-public institutions.

Vulnerable groups, including children in disadvantaged regions, ethnic minorities, orphans, and those from poor households, have received targeted support through initiatives like lunch subsidies and early intervention programs. Children with disabilities have also benefited from early identification and

integration into educational environments. These measures have significantly boosted enrollment rates nationwide and narrowed disparities between rural and urban areas (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2011).

*Improved Global Standing.* Vietnam's education system has gained international recognition, with Vietnamese students consistently excelling in international Olympiads in subjects such as mathematics and physics. The World Bank's 2018 report, *Growing Smarter: Learning and Equitable Development in East Asia and the Pacific*, highlighted Vietnam as a regional leader alongside China. Notably, the academic performance of Vietnamese 15-year-old students surpasses the OECD average, an exceptional accomplishment for a lower-middle-income country (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021; Dang Hieu, 2018).

Higher education institutions have also improved their global standing. In 2020, three universities—Hanoi National University, Ho Chi Minh City National University, and Hanoi University of Science and Technology—ranked among the top 1,000 globally. Additionally, eight Vietnamese universities were included in Asia's top rankings, reflecting gradual alignment with international standards (Pham-Duc et al., 2022; Phan, 2020).

*Advancements in Vocational Education.* Vocational education has been reoriented to align with local socio-economic conditions, meeting students' interests and labor market demands. This shift has improved access to education nationwide, ensuring equity and providing students with practical skills for employment. University autonomy has also been enhanced, facilitating innovations in curricula and governance structures to address the needs of the modern workforce (Pham-Duc et al., 2022).

*Strengthening the Teaching Workforce.* The quality of Vietnam's teaching workforce has played a decisive role in the success of educational reform. As of November 2024, the country had approximately 1.6 million educators, including nearly 80,000 university lecturers. Among them, over 48,000 hold master's degrees, more than 24,000 hold doctoral degrees, and close to 5,000 are professors or associate professors (Huong Giang, 2023). The percentage of teachers meeting qualification standards, as defined by the 2019 Education Law, is 91.7% for

preschool, 74.8% for primary education, 86.1% for lower secondary education, and 99.9% for upper secondary education. Policies mandating international publications for academic titles have further boosted the quality of research output, with Vietnamese articles in ISI/Scopus-indexed journals steadily increasing (Nguyen, 2024; Pham-Duc et al., 2022).

*Digital Transformation and Quality Assurance.* Between 2022 and 2024, Vietnam has embraced a significant digital transformation in education. Comprehensive educational databases have been established, connecting schools and institutions with national systems. Cashless fee payment systems have been implemented, improving administrative efficiency and decision-making processes. These initiatives have addressed critical issues such as teacher shortages and resource optimization.

Moreover, innovations in quality assurance and evaluation methods have transformed educational practices. Periodic quality assurance has become a standard feature, and assessment methods have shifted from knowledge-based evaluations to competency-based measurements, aligning Vietnam's education system with global trends (Pham-Duc et al., 2022).

Vietnam's educational reforms have demonstrated significant progress in legal frameworks, access and equity, global standing, workforce development, and digital transformation. These achievements underscore the country's commitment to building a robust, equitable, and internationally competitive education system. However, persistent challenges remain, requiring sustained effort and targeted investments to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of these reforms.

### **Persistent limitations**

Despite notable achievements, Vietnam's educational reforms continue to face critical limitations that constrain their broader impact. These challenges arise from systemic inefficiencies and contextual constraints, requiring sustained and targeted interventions.

*Ineffective Policy Implementation.* The dissemination and execution of reform policies have been inconsistent across regions. In many localities, education is deprioritized due to budget constraints and limited political commitment, resulting in insufficient resource allocation. Policies often fail to translate into actionable measures, leaving significant gaps between intent and implementation (Pham & Van, 2024). The principle that “education and training are the top national priorities” frequently remains more rhetorical than practical, undermining the effectiveness of reforms.

*Teacher Shortages and Inequities.* Teacher shortages and their uneven distribution across regions present persistent challenges. Local governments maintain control over staffing decisions, often leading to mismatched allocations that leave disadvantaged areas underserved. While the qualifications of teaching staff have improved, systemic issues such as inadequate pre-service training and limited opportunities for professional development persist (Anh, 2015). These shortcomings hinder the widespread adoption of innovative teaching practices and exacerbate educational inequities between urban and rural areas.

*Isolation of Higher Education.* Vietnam’s higher education system remains relatively isolated, with limited alignment to international standards. Degrees issued by Vietnamese institutions are not widely recognized abroad, restricting opportunities for graduates to pursue further education or employment internationally. Moreover, higher education remains overly focused on undergraduate programs, with postgraduate enrollment comprising only 5% of total students—a stark contrast to global and regional benchmarks (Nguyen, 2024). The low proportion of STEM-focused postgraduate training further undermines the country’s capacity for research, innovation, and technological development.

*Testing and Evaluation Challenges.* Inconsistencies in testing and evaluation systems, particularly for high school graduation and university admissions, create significant stress for students, educators, and parents. Frequent changes in evaluation policies have disrupted the continuity of reform efforts, eroding public confidence in the education system. These inconsistencies undermine the credibility

of assessments and contribute to inefficiencies in the system (Pham-Duc et al., 2022).

*Funding Constraints.* Despite policy commitments, state budget allocations for education remain below the levels stipulated in the 2019 Education Law. This funding shortfall has led to infrastructure deficits, such as a high prevalence of temporary classrooms in rural areas, and limited investments in modern teaching facilities and resources. These financial constraints exacerbate disparities between urban and rural schools and hinder efforts to achieve equitable education (Huong Giang, 2023).

Addressing these persistent limitations requires a concerted effort to ensure consistent policy implementation, equitable distribution of resources, and alignment with international standards. Greater investment in teacher training, infrastructure, and postgraduate education will be critical to overcoming these challenges and sustaining Vietnam's educational progress.

### **Systemic Causes of Limitations**

The limitations of Vietnam's educational reforms can largely be attributed to systemic and contextual factors. These challenges have arisen amidst constrained economic resources, a legacy of centralized governance, and significant socio-cultural barriers. Ensuring equitable access to quality education across diverse regions and demographics, particularly in a multi-ethnic society, has proven difficult. The emergence of private education has further complicated governance, as many non-public institutions operate outside the direct control of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET).

*Economic Constraints and Governance Challenges.* Vietnam's reforms have been implemented in the context of limited economic resources, which has hindered the ability to invest adequately in infrastructure, teacher training, and digital tools. The rise of private education, while expanding access, has introduced new governance issues. Non-public institutions often function with minimal oversight

from MOET, leading to disparities in quality and alignment with national educational goals.

*Cultural and Societal Factors.* Traditional hierarchical teacher-student dynamics, deeply embedded in Vietnam's culture, have slowed the adoption of student-centered teaching practices. Despite policy efforts to promote learner-centered education, societal emphasis on examination results continues to prioritize rote learning over critical thinking and creativity (Ho & Dimmock, 2023). This cultural resistance has limited the impact of reforms aimed at transforming pedagogical methods.

Additionally, Vietnam's education system faces challenges related to broader societal changes. Non-traditional issues, such as addressing the needs of children with autism or depression and managing the impact of rising divorce rates, have introduced complexities that existing policies are ill-equipped to handle.

*The Digital Age and Knowledge Economy Demands.* The rapid expansion of digitalization and knowledge in the 21st century has rendered traditional educational approaches increasingly inadequate. Vietnam's current curriculum and teaching methodologies often fail to prepare students for the demands of a modern, knowledge-based economy. While digital transformation initiatives have been introduced, they remain unevenly implemented, with rural and disadvantaged areas lagging significantly behind (Nguyen, 2024).

*Transition to a Market Economy.* The shift to a market-oriented economy has brought about challenges related to cultural and ethical values, such as balancing economic competitiveness with equity and social cohesion. This transition has highlighted the need for an education system that not only produces skilled workers but also fosters innovation and adaptability. However, these objectives have been difficult to achieve due to systemic barriers and outdated practices.

Addressing these systemic causes requires bold and coordinated action. Vietnam's ambition for a "century of national resurgence" necessitates a reevaluation of existing bottlenecks and systemic barriers. Comprehensive efforts to align education policies with the demands of a digital, knowledge-driven



economy, while addressing cultural and governance challenges, are essential for realizing the transformative potential of the country's educational reforms.

### **3. Challenges in Vietnam's Educational Reform Process**

Over a decade into its educational reform journey, Vietnam has made notable progress; however, several significant challenges have emerged that threaten to hinder the reform's success. These challenges highlight inconsistencies in implementation, inadequate resource preparation, and the lack of a cohesive educational philosophy.

#### **Inconsistent reform efforts**

Vietnam's approach to educational reform has been marked by inconsistencies in execution, leaving key initiatives incomplete or controversial. The ambitious objectives of the reform program have often revealed practical inadequacies, sparking debates over whether certain measures should continue. Key examples include the implementation of a "one curriculum, multiple textbooks" policy, subject integration in general education, and university admissions reform.

*Implementation of "one curriculum, multiple textbooks" policy.* For the first time, Vietnam introduced the principle of "one curriculum with multiple textbooks," departing from its historical reliance on a single standardized textbook set produced by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). This reform aimed to foster competition among publishers to produce high-quality educational materials. However, the policy has given rise to several challenges.

One major issue has been unethical collusions between textbook publishers and educational institutions, influencing the selection of textbooks for teaching. Additionally, discrepancies in content across different textbook sets have posed difficulties for students, particularly in standardized national examinations. Publishers have also been allowed to set their own prices, leading to increased costs that place financial strain on families.

In response to widespread public criticism, the Chairperson of the 15th National Assembly instructed MOET on August 14, 2023, to produce a state-approved textbook set, current Minister of Education and Training Nguyen Kim Son opposed this move, citing concerns about wastefulness (Huong Giang, 2023). As of now, the debate over whether to adopt a state-approved textbook set or continue with the multi-textbook system remains unresolved, creating uncertainty among stakeholders and anxiety among teachers and textbook publishers.

*Integration of subjects in general education.* Another hallmark of the reform program, subject integration in general education, has failed to achieve its intended goals. Under the new curriculum, students can choose from three subject groups: Social Sciences (history, geography, economics, and law), Natural Sciences (physics, chemistry, and biology), and Technology and Arts (technology, computer science, music, and fine arts). While this approach aims to create interdisciplinary connections, teacher training institutions have not adapted their programs to align with this structure.

Teachers trained in single disciplines have received additional training to teach integrated subjects but often lack confidence when covering content outside their expertise. Schools have adopted stopgap measures, assigning different teachers to handle portions of integrated subjects that align with their respective specializations. Consequently, the original purpose of subject integration has been largely undermined.

*Student-centered learning in overcrowded classrooms.* The reform program's principle of "student-centered learning" requires a class size of 30–35 students to ensure effective implementation. However, due to limitations in infrastructure and teaching staff, the average class size remains between 45 and 60 students. Overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for teachers to manage and engage students effectively, while class discussions and interactive activities are often poorly conducted.

*Frequent changes in university admissions policies.* Frequent changes to university admissions policies have added significant pressure on students, teachers, and families. Reforming high school graduation exams and university

entrance methods is a national priority, but MOET's repeated adjustments have created confusion. For example, MOET's Decision No. 4068/QD-BGDĐT, issued on November 28, 2023, outlines a new plan for organizing high school graduation exams and university admissions starting in 2025 (Vietnam Government Newspaper, 2024). However, the lack of consistency among subsequent education reforms has led to instability and tension throughout society.

### **Inadequate resource preparation for reform**

A key challenge in Vietnam's educational reform has been insufficient preparation, particularly regarding material and human resources.

*Material resource constraints.* Article 96 of the 2019 Education Law mandates that state budget expenditure on education and training account for at least 20% of the total state budget (Dang Hieu, 2018). In practice, however, this target has not been met, with ed amounting to only 17.1% in 2021, 17.9% in 2022, and 15.8% in 2023 (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019). Budget allocations in many localities fail to prioritize education, leaving in struggling to build, renovate, and maintain infrastructure. This financial shortfall has also hindered the procurement of modern teaching equipment and the construction of permanent classrooms, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas.

*Human resource challenges.* The 2024–2025 academic year marks the fifth year of iral education curriculum reform. Yet, many provinces and cities are still grappling with teacher shortages and uneven distribution of teaching staff across subjects. Teacher training institutions have not adequately prepared educators to teach integrated subjects, leaving schools unable to offer all subject groups under the new curriculum. Consequently, students are often forced to select subject groups based on teacher availability rather than personal interests or career aspirations.

### **Lack of a consistent educational philosophy**

A recurring critique of Vietnam's educational reform clear and consistent educational philosophy to guide its direction. An educational philosophy provides foundational principles that inform objectives, content, and methodologies, effectively answering the questions: "Who does this education aim to develop, and how?"

The lack of a unified philosophy has led to inconsistent reform implementation and public skepticism. When faced with challenges, society often advocates for reverting to previous methods, reflecting a conservative mindset that hampers progress. Without a well-articulated educational philosophy, reforms are vulnerable to being perceived as superficial or half-hearted, further limiting their effectiveness.

Vietnam's educational reform has made notable strides but continues to face significant challenges, including inconsistent implementation, inadequate resource preparation, and the absence of a cohesive educational philosophy. Addressing these issues requires sustained efforts and decisive action to align reform initiatives with the country's long-term development goals. By resolving these challenges, Vietnam can create a more equitable, effective, and forward-looking education system that prepares its citizens for the demands of the modern world.

#### ***4. Recommendations and the Path Forward***

To address the persistent challenges in Vietnam's education system and fully realize the potential of educational reform, a multifaceted and systematic approach is required. This section outlines key recommendations for overcoming existing limitations and propelling Vietnam's education system toward global standards.

##### **Strengthening Policy Implementation**

The government must prioritize education through increased funding and resource allocation. Clear accountability mechanisms are necessary to ensure consistent implementation of policies across regions. Reform measures must be actionable and adaptable to local contexts, avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions. As

noted by Pham and Van (2024), translating the principle of “education and training as the top national priorities” into tangible outcomes requires coordinated efforts across all levels of government.

### **Addressing Teacher Shortages and Inequities**

Empowering school principals to make staffing decisions can alleviate teacher shortages, especially in underserved regions. Enhancing pre-service and in-service training programs with a focus on practical applications and innovative pedagogy will equip teachers with the skills needed for 21st-century demands (Anh, 2015). To attract and retain educators, particularly in disadvantaged areas, Vietnam must prioritize competitive salaries and introduce policies such as subsidized housing, low-interest home loans, and professional development opportunities.

Teacher training institutions also need increased investment to align their capacity with societal demands. Tuition-free programs for talented individuals, especially in STEM fields, should continue to ensure a pipeline of high-quality educators. Addressing systemic disparities in teacher allocation will help bridge educational inequities between urban and rural areas.

### **Enhancing International Integration**

Vietnam’s higher education institutions must align curricula with international standards to improve the global recognition of degrees. Expanding postgraduate programs, particularly in STEM fields, will strengthen research and innovation capacity (Nguyen, 2024). Partnerships with foreign universities can facilitate knowledge exchange and foster international mobility for students and faculty. Additionally, increasing the use of English as a medium of instruction and improving foreign language proficiency among students are critical steps toward global integration.

Policies should also attract foreign experts, overseas Vietnamese, and international students to domestic institutions. Establishing campuses of

prestigious global universities in Vietnam and funding overseas training for high-quality human resources, especially doctoral-level university lecturers, will further enhance Vietnam's global academic standing (Dang Hieu, 2018; Thanh Hang, 2021).

### **Stabilizing Testing and Evaluation Systems**

Vietnam must establish consistent and transparent evaluation frameworks to reduce stress and build public confidence in the education system. Frequent changes to testing policies disrupt continuity and undermine trust. Moving toward competency-based assessments will align evaluation systems with global trends, better preparing students for the modern workforce (Pham-Duc et al., 2022).

### **Increasing Investment in Education Infrastructure**

Adequate financial resources are vital for addressing infrastructure deficits, particularly in rural and remote areas. The state must allocate at least 20% of its budget to education, as mandated by the 2019 Education Law (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2019). Eliminating temporary classrooms and constructing permanent, national-standard schools should be prioritized. Additionally, resources should focus on equipping schools with modern teaching facilities and digital tools to bridge the urban-rural divide.

To complement state funding, Vietnam must encourage greater participation from private entities and international organizations. Expanding scholarships, tuition waivers, and affordable loan programs for students in priority fields will ensure equitable access to education for all demographics.

### **Promoting Digital Transformation**

Digital transformation is central to Vietnam's education strategy. The MOET has already initiated steps to implement digital transformation through programs like digital student records and enhanced IT application (Dang Hieu, 2018). Building

on these efforts, the government must prioritize raising awareness among educators and equipping them with digital skills. Expanding access to digital tools and infrastructure, especially in rural areas, will ensure that all students benefit from technological advancements.

### **Enhancing Awareness and Legal Frameworks**

Educational reform must be recognized as a national priority across the political system and society. Awareness campaigns should emphasize the objectives, demands, and benefits of reform to build public trust and foster patience while awaiting tangible outcomes. Legal frameworks, including provisions in the 2018 Higher Education Law and 2019 Education Law, require regular revisions to reflect evolving domestic and global contexts. Comprehensive laws on lifelong learning and teacher development must be urgently enacted to support the long-term goals of reform (Duong, 2024).

### **Strengthening International Cooperation**

Vietnam's comprehensive integration strategy should extend to education. Attracting foreign investment and expertise, alongside developing partnerships with strategic allies, will enhance human resource quality and align education with global standards. Establishing mechanisms to attract international students and foreign academics to Vietnam's institutions is crucial for fostering diversity and innovation (Dang Hieu, 2018; Thanh Hang, 2021).

Vietnam's ambition to become a developed nation by 2045, as articulated in the 13th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (2021), hinges on accelerating educational reforms. Addressing systemic bottlenecks, leveraging international cooperation, and fostering digital transformation are essential steps. By enhancing public awareness, revising policies, increasing investment, and empowering educators, Vietnam can build an equitable and globally competitive education system that contributes to sustainable national development. The

Politburo's Conclusion No. 91-KL/TW (2024) reaffirms the nation's commitment to comprehensive reform, emphasizing education's central role in driving progress and achieving national resurgence.

## Conclusion

This study provides a critical evaluation of Vietnam's comprehensive educational reform more than a decade after the adoption of Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW. The central focus of the research has been to assess how Vietnam's reform efforts align with its socio-economic objectives, particularly the goals of industrialization, modernization, and global integration. The findings reveal substantial progress in several key areas. Reforms in policy frameworks, universal preschool education, teacher quality, digital transformation, and international cooperation have yielded impressive results. For instance, Vietnam's literacy rate now exceeds 97%, and its universities have secured positions in global rankings for the first time. Furthermore, the adoption of competency-based assessment methods and the integration of digital tools in education demonstrate the transformative impact of these reforms in enhancing accessibility, quality, and alignment with global standards.

Nevertheless, significant challenges persist, posing obstacles to the full realization of reform objectives. Key issues include insufficient preparation in financial and human resources, inconsistent implementation of reform policies, and the lack of a cohesive educational philosophy to unify and guide efforts. These limitations threaten the sustainability and effectiveness of the reform process, leaving critical gaps that need urgent attention. Addressing these challenges requires continued exploration of strategies to overcome teacher shortages, align educational programs with labor market demands, and ensure equitable access to quality education across diverse regions. Additionally, the development of a clear and unified educational philosophy could provide a strategic foundation for sustaining and amplifying the impacts of future reforms.



Vietnam's journey offers valuable lessons for other developing nations striving for similar educational and socio-economic transformation. By addressing existing bottlenecks and building on its achievements, Vietnam can establish a globally competitive education system. This progress would not only support its ambition to become a developed nation by 2045 but also serve as a model for equitable and transformative education reform on a global scale.

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