Total area: 331 689 sq km
Population: 75 181 000

Illiterate population aged 15 years and over: 2,916,000 (1995 estimates)
percentage of illiterates: 6.3%
Public current expenditure on education (1997)
as percentage of GNP: 2.8%
Public current expenditure by level of education (1997)
pre-primary: 5%
primary: 38%
secondary: 26%
tertiary: 22%
Gross enrolment ratios by level of education (1996)
pre-primary: 38%
primary: 115%
secondary: 52%
tertiary: 7%

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National Curriculum for Basic Education in Vietnam

DO DINH HOAN

From 1996 to the year 2000, Vietnam has organized the development and pilot implementation of the National Curriculum of Basic Education (including primary education and lower secondary education). On 9 December 2000, the National Assembly of Vietnam issued a directive to revise the general education curriculum, which clearly mentions that from school year 2002–2003 the new curriculum of Basic education will be implemented throughout the country.

In this report, we mainly deal with Vietnam’s new curriculum of basic education.

1.1 Brief Introduction/Background on the National Curriculum

1.1a Pertinent laws and policies bearing on the national curriculum for basic education

The Education Act submitted to the National Assembly in December 1998 includes articles related to curriculum policies as follows:

*Article 4: Education principle. Educational activities should be implemented according to the principle; education should be combined with labor and production and scientific research; theory should be linked with reality; learning should go together with practice; education in schools should be combined with education in the family and in the society.*

*Article 5: Content and Methods of Education.*

1. The content of education should be basic, practical, modernized, all-sided, appropriate to the psychological development of the learner, in order to meet the requirements of training people—the human factor, which serves the socioeconomic development and scientific and technological advance.

2. The methods of education should help learners learn creative thinking and the will to progress, and develop the ability for self-learning and self-study.

*Article 6: Any religious doctrine must not be propagated and any religious ceremony must not be conducted in the schools or other educational institutions belonging to the national education system.*

*Article 7: Language to be used in school.*

1. Vietnamese is the official language in schools.

2. Ethnic groups have the right to learn by and use their own language and script to create a basis for the preservation and development of the ethnic culture.
Article 24: Requirements of general education content and teaching methodology.

1. Primary education should enable pupils to have the basic and necessary understanding about nature, society and people; to obtain basic skills in listening, reading, speaking, writing and calculation; to acquire habits of maintaining health and hygiene; to have basic knowledge of music and the fine arts.

Secondary education (middle schools) should consolidate and develop the content learned in primary schools; enable students to acquire basic understanding of Vietnamese language, mathematics, national history, added knowledge of social sciences, natural sciences, laws, information technology, foreign language and minimum knowledge of vocation.

2. Teaching methodology of general education should enable students to bring into play their activities, creativity, self-awareness and initiative.

3. The teaching methods should be appropriate to the characteristics of each class level and subject. Students should be provided with self-study methods, skills of applying knowledge to life.

4. The content and teaching methodology of general education should be presented in an educational program that is enforced by the Ministry of Education and Training.

Article 25: Textbooks

Textbooks should reflect the goals/objectives and principles of general education. They should concretize educational content, teaching methodology, which are defined in the curriculum. Governmental Decision No.43/2000/ND-CP on August 30, 2000 was formulated to guide the implementation of some Educational Act articles, namely,

Article 8: Councils for approving the curriculum

1. The councils have to approve the curricula, textbooks as well as teaching materials for general education. The councils include a number of experienced teachers, educational managers and scientists of related areas. Each council has at least one-fourth of the total member-teachers who are currently teaching in schools.

2. The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) decides to establish national councils for approving the curriculum, textbooks and teaching materials, which are generally used in universities and colleges.

MOET defines the functions, tasks, authority, and procedures of operation, standards, number and ratio of members for each council. MOET directly manages the operation of these councils.

The resolution of the Vietnamese National Assembly (Session 8) on the strategic direction of educational development in the period of national industrialization and modernization and tasks towards 2000:

Essential Solutions

1. To continue revising the general education content, teaching methodology, training and strengthening the school infrastructure, the following activities must be undertaken:
   
   - Review the current textbooks, delete impractical content, add necessary content which is updated on the progress of science and technology; strengthen students’
ability to function at general education level, but try to keep content, curriculum and textbooks relatively unchanged towards 2000.

- Organize specific subject councils that include excellent head educators and scientists who could do research on compilation and experimentation with teaching content, curriculum and textbooks. They could also study teaching methods; teaching aids and school activities, which could be applied after 2000.

**Reform of Educational Management**

The state policies of education, revision of content procedures, methodology, assessment and exams should be based on careful research and experimentation, and should be suitable to the reality of Vietnam and properly applied in schools as defined by regulation.

### 1.1b The underlying philosophy and rationale of the national curriculum

Vietnam is currently in the process of modernizing and industrializing the country. It is in the process of joining the international community but continues to preserve and develop its national traditions.

The socioeconomic, political, and cultural conditions of the country require redesigning the objectives, contents and methods of general education in order to meet the needs of training the human resource for the country’s period of industrialization and modernization.

**Underlying Philosophy**

- The national curriculum should aim to satisfy the needs of students’ studies so that they can exist, develop and integrate in the community.
- The national curriculum should focus on children, based on their positive activities to help them create the demands of studies and learn how to teach themselves, seek and acquire new knowledge by themselves.
- The national curriculum should be appropriate to the level of progressive development of Vietnamese children, which could create favorable conditions for Vietnamese people to integrate in the community and compete in the international market.

**Rationale of the National Curriculum**

- The national curriculum should ensure comprehensive balance between
  - Educational aspects (moral, intelligent, health and aesthetic education) and basic skills as required of students; and
  - Educating children and providing knowledge and providing vocations (jobs);
- The national curriculum should be unified in its goals/objectives, plans, levels and structure of content, teaching methodology, standards, assessment and evaluation. The national curriculum should continue from primary education to lower secondary education.

### 1.1c The objectives of education

The objectives of education (for the formal education section) are forming and fostering the personality, quality and ability of a citizen; training working people who are holistically developed, faithful to the ideal of national independence and the building of a just and civilized society, who are moral and healthy, knowledgeable, and possess a sense of being a member of the
community, who are dynamic and creative and know how to preserve and promote the cultural values of the nation, and accept the essence of the cultural tradition of mankind, who have the sense of discipline in an organized manner so as to meet the requirements for building and defending the fatherland.

1.1d Competencies and perceptions of students graduating from primary and lower secondary level

Completing primary school, a pupil should have the following major competencies and understandings:

a. Read clearly and fluently a text (about 15 words/minute); read with expression, a short text, a poem; and understand the content and the meaning of the text or poem. Write a descriptive composition. Initially know how to take down simple notes while listening to a talk or other’s ideas.

Express one’s ideas clearly while discussing, recite the whole passage when telling or describing.

b. To know how to read, write, compare, practice addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of a natural number, a fraction, and decimal number. Know how to use common units in measuring length, amount, volume, area, and time. Know how to calculate circumference, perimeter of a rectangle, a square, a triangle, a circle, a parallelogram, a lozenge, a trapezium; know how to calculate the lateral area, the total area, the volume of a rectangular parallelepiped, a cube. Know how to solve a simple problem using the four steps of calculation.

c. Understand the basics of the natural and social environment, the reproduction of animals and plants.

Recognize some signs of puberty and maintain hygiene. Do not use addictive drugs. Know the danger of some social diseases and way of preventing them. Know some characteristics and use of some common materials. Know how to use electricity and fuel safely and economically.

d. Understand and present at a simple level some historic representative events, phenomena, personalities of Vietnam in the periods from the end of the nineteenth century to the present; some main natural characteristics, population, and the economic activities of Vietnam and other countries of the world. Basically know how to use maps, pictures, data, texts,... to find some simple information on history and geography.

e. Know how to serve oneself and help the family, such as to mend, to sew buttons, to sew a buttonhole, to make simple embroidery for decoration, to cook daily meals. Know how to grow some plants and raise pets.

f. Draw and knead into shapes, blocks, man and animal. Try to comment on a picture or a statue according to one’s own appreciation.

g. Correctly sing the songs learned in school. Know the rhythms 2/4, 4/4, etc. and practice reading simple written music. Know how to listen to and explain music.

h. Realize correctly, quickly and evenly the skills of standing in formation, a lineup. Can do the exercise for the development of the whole body, position training games, optional sports (learned in grade 4).
i. Have a sense of exercising rights and obligations of oneself in the family and in schools.
   Strive to follow the beautiful, the good, and the right. Love the native land, the country,
   and peace.

After completing lower secondary school, the pupil should

a. Have acquired the personality appropriate to the age and objectives of lower secondary
   level. They should be able
   • to love the country, understand and believe in the ideals of independence, nation and
     socialism;
   • to be proud of the tradition of building the country; defending the country and the
     national cultural identity, be concerned about the problems which affect the whole
     world and the regions;
   • to contribute to a just and civilized society through learning, working and serving the
     public welfare;
   • to have a healthy way of living, be industrious and thrifty, truthful and have humanness
     and a sense of responsibility and cooperation in the family, school, community and
     society, and respect the value of labor. To act according to the regulations of the
     school, the community in particular, and the law in general;

b. Have general, basic knowledge appropriate to the requirements of the educational level, as
   reflected in the following aspects:

   Understand the most essential, representative contents so that, basing on these contents, the
   pupil can learn other contents of humanistic and social science, natural science and
   technology;
   Grasp knowledge, which is meaningful to the individual’s life, family and community;
   Have a deeper understanding of a certain field of science and technique as compared to the
   general requirements of the curriculum, depending on the ability and aspirations to
   continue learning further or to join the world of work.

c. Have skills of initially using knowledge acquired and experienced such as:
   • to know how to observe, collect, analyze information through the contents learned;
   • to know how to utilize in a creative way the knowledge learned to solve the problems
     commonly encountered in the life of individuals and community;
   • to have skills for simple tasks;
   • to know how to appreciate beauty and have the love for creating beauty in life and in
     literature and art;
   • to know how exercise maintain personal hygiene and protect one’s health;
   • to know how to use one’s time properly to maintain balance between mental and bodily
     activities, rest and work;
   • to know how to decide for oneself as a result of learning and working. The above-
     mentioned qualities, knowledge and skills should be formed and consolidated so as to
     create an educated and competent Vietnamese in the period of industrialization and
     modernization;
Ability to act effectively based on knowledge, skills and qualities as a result of teaching and education, in learning communication, daring to think, daring to do and to assume responsibility;

Ability to adapt to changes in the realities so as to take initiative, be flexible and creative in learning, working, living as well as in integrating with the natural environment and the social community;

Ability to communicate and behave humanely and in a cultured way reflecting the sense of responsibility for family, community and society;

Ability for self-esteem reflected in the spirit of striving to learn and to work, constantly to train oneself, be able to self-evaluate and criticize within the environment of activities and the experience of oneself.

1.2 Changing structures and organization of learning content:

The agency mainly responsible for the research and development of the Vietnamese curriculum is the Centre for Curriculum Development and Methodology of General Education under the National Institute for Educational Science (NIES). While compiling the curriculum the Minister of MOET decided to establish a Board for Compiling Curriculum and assigned NIES to be the agency in charge. Experts of subjects of MOET, teachers of universities and excellent teachers of general education are selected to be members of the Board for Compiling Curriculum.

In the process of developing the curriculum, experts, professionals, administrators, teachers and parents are invited to comment on or evaluate the curriculum.

Vietnam has been designing the curriculum from primary to secondary to be implemented from the year after 2000 for the training of human resource for the period of industrialization and modernization of the country (2000–2020).

The aim of the curriculum development agency is to coordinate approaches in designing the curriculum according to the themes and outputs (outcomes) (when designing the curriculum, each theme and the minimum standards of each theme will be mentioned).

The curriculum is designed in such a way that it enables teachers to understand and implement the curriculum flexibly according to the actual conditions of each region and the pupils’ level of development.

In the curriculum allocation, about 15 percent is allocated for the content of the locality (local history, geography, traditions of production and culture).

• For gifted students: apart from the compulsory subjects of the curriculum, there are optional subjects and activities for the development of individual ability. In primary schools, there are elective subjects (informatics education, foreign languages, and activities for training students in subjects, such as mathematics, Vietnamese, and science, etc.). At upper secondary level, there are schools and class for gifted students in mathematics, literature, physics, chemistry, informatics education, foreign languages, biology, history, etc.).

• For ethnic students who have not yet known or know only a little Vietnamese: there is a bilingual program (ethnic language and Vietnamese).
• For students in hard-to-reach areas (remote mountainous areas, flooded areas in the Mekong River Delta): Students can follow the general curriculum with flexible implementation so that it can be relevant to the conditions of multigrade classes.
• For handicapped students: There is special curriculum (with the application of the general curriculum for the handicapped target students).

1.3 Designing and implementing local curricula

1.3a The adoption of the national curriculum in the public and private schools

The adoption of the national curriculum in the formal school system entails a unified curriculum for all kinds of schools in the provinces in the whole country. This unification is expressed in the educational objectives and standards for each subject and level.

However, the provinces can base its implementation on the specific circumstances and conditions of different kinds of individuals.
1.3b Existing infrastructure support for the national curriculum

State of Infrastructure and School Equipment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>No. of Schools</th>
<th>No. of Classes</th>
<th>No. of Pupils</th>
<th>Pupils/Class</th>
<th>No. of Class-rooms</th>
<th>No. of unqualified Class-rooms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>13,387</td>
<td>322,241</td>
<td>10,063,02</td>
<td>531.23</td>
<td>203,898</td>
<td>57,744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary</td>
<td>7,384</td>
<td>139,657</td>
<td>5,768,843</td>
<td>41.31</td>
<td>89,000</td>
<td>78,059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of classrooms with three shifts/day: 1,408 rooms, 1,213 rooms of which are Primary and Lower Secondary: 195 rooms

Many schools have only classrooms and do not yet have other facilities, such as laboratory, library, workshop, playground for physical education, school garden, etc.

School equipment

Only three provinces with 100 percent of schools have equipment for 80 percent of practicing hours as given in the curriculum. Thirty-four provinces have 50 percent of schools with equipment implementing 50 percent of the practicing hours as given in the curriculum.

Many schools have computer rooms, lab rooms for foreign languages but their efficient use is still very low.

Infrastructure Needs, Facilities to be Planned (up to Year 2005)

Schools

The total number of classrooms for learning two sessions/day and one class/room: 439,091 rooms. These are classified according to level:

Primary: 324,591
Lower secondary: 114,500
The number of classrooms to be built: 146, 193. If we include all the unqualified classrooms to be upgraded, the number of rooms will be 203,387. In addition to classrooms, all the schools need to have laboratories, libraries, workshops, playground and rooms for physical education.

1.3c State of textbooks and instructional materials

The government directly supports the compilation and development of textbooks and teacher’s book. The writing of textbooks proceeds as follows:

- The National Institute of Educational Science, the Educational Publishing House, the Councils of Subjects of the Ministry of Education and Training jointly select and introduce a list of authors that the minister of MOET can approve and decide on.
- The Educational Publishing House (an agency of MOET) organizes the writing of textbooks (gives financial support, creates favorable conditions for consulting professionals and experts).
- The Council for Considering and Approving Textbook under MOET will evaluate the drafts then submits them to the Minister for approval.

Each level of education usually has only one set of textbooks (under the control of MOET). There is no option for textbooks. Apart from textbooks, there are teacher’s books, exercise books, and reference books for teachers and students, videocassette tapes for the teaching/learning of each subject.

The state controls the development and writing of various kinds of books used in the schools. Private companies can develop and print reference books for teachers and students only those, which are not compulsory. Books printed will be sold to teachers and students (distributed free of charge only for those students who are in the especially inaccessible areas). At present, we are preparing a program for lending textbooks to primary students in the difficult areas.

The suggested way of using textbooks is common use at the basic education level. At present the government of Vietnam is preparing for various ways of lending, renting textbooks to pupils at universalized levels of education (primary, lower secondary) according to the income of the family and the needs of pupils. Teacher’s guides and reference materials for different subjects accompany all textbooks. All these books and materials are bought with funds from the state and put in the school library for common use.

1.3d Training of teachers

There are different ways of training teachers, and these include in-service training, distance education, selection of excellent teachers for each subject, professional activities for groups of subjects in each grade level in each school or a group of schools.

In-service training is compulsory for all teachers. Each year, forty-five days during the summer vacation are usually spent on training teachers. In general, there is financial support for in-service training of teachers.

Vietnam is now preparing to qualify teachers in each level of education (because formerly the training level of primary and lower secondary teachers was not equal). Therefore, the goal is to make unqualified teachers study so they become qualified. Besides, Vietnam encourages teachers to upgrade their qualification (those who have university degree have to acquire postgraduate degree, etc.). When the teachers qualify for higher levels, they usually get a commensurate new level of salary.
To help teachers implement the new curriculum effectively, Vietnam usually conducts training for teachers according to the new curriculum and textbooks (study about content, methods of teaching of each subject). These training courses are usually conducted during the summer vacation.

**Promoting Interdisciplinary Skills in Basic Education Curriculum**

After three years of piloting, the content of primary education curriculum has been analyzed to take out overlaps and the unnecessary, and integrate the contents of some subjects. In the Draft Primary Education Curriculum (1996) in grades 1, 2, and 3 there are nine subjects: Vietnamese language, mathematics, moral education, natural and social studies, art, physical education. In each subject, contents that are closely related are arranged around the same theme for coherence. For instance, the content of the subject natural and social studies includes three main themes: man, nature, society; these topics are structured according to the “concentric and gradual expansion” in grades 1, 2, and 3 so that the content is arranged from simple to complex... from near to far, etc.

One of the foci of basic education curriculum renovation in Vietnam is to improve the teaching methods according to the following orientation:

- Teaching is based on the creative, initiative-taking activities of the pupils which will help pupils to form the method of self-learning for themselves.
- Develop abilities of individuals according to the characteristics of each pupil. Give up the way of teaching for the “same series” and not to differentiate the pupils so as to create favorable conditions for the development of individual abilities.
- Change the relationship between the teacher and pupil. Pupils have to be really involved in and take responsibility in the process of learning. Teachers should organize, guide and cooperate with pupils and help them develop interest in learning and becoming successful in learning.
- Diverse forms of organizing teaching/learning, teaching for individuals, for groups, class, and teaching in and out of the classrooms.
- Use learning/teaching aids properly, encourage teachers to make simple teaching aids using local low-cost materials, and gradually increase the use of technical aids/means where possible.

**1.4 Evaluation of curriculum reform**

**1.4a Monitoring and evaluation system**

A basic curriculum evaluation is undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) forming the survey project based on an appropriate model (for instance, selecting ten provinces out of fifty-six provinces representing various developed regions).

Inspecting education at all levels. Activities include:

- Reviewing textbooks (there is only one particular selection of textbooks compiled and approved by MOET periodically, etc.);
- Examining periodically the quality of teaching and learning;
• Conducting surveys to elicit comments and suggestions from different communities;
and
• Setting up scientific subject area councils for curriculum evaluation. (In 1995, nine
subject-area scientific councils were set up for 9-primary-curriculum evaluation, etc.)

Curriculum Evaluation

The main mechanisms for curriculum evaluation include using MOET’s system of
scientific subject area councils (consisting of educational scientists, educators, excellent
teachers).

The new curricula should be tested in schools; experience should be drawn after the
teaching experiment and an extensive survey held for teachers’ and parents’ comments on the
curriculum. These should be done before the new curriculum is evaluated and approved by
scientific subject-area councils.

After the curriculum evaluation, it should be submitted to the minister of MOET for
permission to be implemented or adjusted/improved or disapproved so that a new curriculum
could be developed instead.

Monitoring of Local Curriculum

In Vietnam, 15 percent of the teaching time schedule is devoted to a locally controlled
curriculum component (teaching local geography, history, traditional vocations or trades,
ethnic group languages, etc.). However, the local curriculum has not been monitored.

Student Assessment for Curriculum Monitoring

The following are forms of evaluating the impact of curriculum on student achievement:

• Evaluation by educational managers at all levels by observing classes, and inspecting
registration books and teaching materials of teachers.
• Evaluation through performance-testing periodical tests (4 times per school year).
• Evaluation through teaching competitions held for excellent teachers (to determine
how the curriculum can best be implemented), through graduation examinations or
surprise tests on learning quality, etc.

1.4b Achievement indicators (enrolment/dropout rates in each grade/school
year, percent passing national graduation examinations at primary,
lower secondary levels)

Total Number of General Education Pupils in the Whole Country at the Beginning of the
School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pupils (Thousand)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16,348.0</td>
<td>16,970.2</td>
<td>17,391.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>10,352.7</td>
<td>10,383.6</td>
<td>10,223.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>4,839.7</td>
<td>5,204.6</td>
<td>5,514.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Percentage of Pupils Passing as Compared with the Total Setting for Examination

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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>96.42</td>
<td>97.29</td>
<td>98.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percent of Promotion, Repetition, Dropout by Grade Level in School Year 1997–1998

Primary Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Grade 1 (%)</th>
<th>Grade 2 (%)</th>
<th>Grade 3 (%)</th>
<th>Grade 4 (%)</th>
<th>Grade 5 (%)</th>
<th>Grade 6 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>85.69</td>
<td>91.30</td>
<td>92.95</td>
<td>90.37</td>
<td>93.37</td>
<td>89.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>7.58</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lower Secondary Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Grade 7 (%)</th>
<th>Grade 8 (%)</th>
<th>Grade 9 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>88.17</td>
<td>89.92</td>
<td>91.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropout</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>7.81</td>
<td>6.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.4c External or commissioned reviews regularly or periodically conducted by special committees or task forces on the Curriculum or the education sector

The national basic education curriculum of Vietnam, after its development, has been published widely in newspapers and other media for public comments. The following are the various comments on the revision of the curriculum and textbooks, which are being tested in schools in Vietnam.

Comments of the Committee of Culture and Education for Youth and Pioneers Under the National Assembly of Vietnam:

- The revision of general education curriculum and textbooks is indispensable and very important;
- We agree with the 5 principles of the new curriculum: thoroughly grasping the goals/objectives of education; ensuring it must be scientific and pedagogical; ensuring it must be unified; meeting the needs of development; ensuring it must be feasible;
- The committee found that “The orientation of curriculum and textbooks revision in primary and lower secondary education were proven to be better because the weaknesses of the current curriculum and textbooks were overcome.” However, they zeroed in on 2 points: first, the number of teaching periods (hours) is not enough as students go to school only half a day (in the morning or afternoon). Second, the approach of integration does not contribute much to the development of the curriculum or textbooks.

“In general, it is scientific and urgent to organize the procedures for developing the curriculum and textbooks as well as establishing scientific subject councils. We have chosen outstanding scientists and educators who are familiar with general education and experienced in compiling textbooks, updating scientific and technical achievements..."
in writing textbooks.” The committee requested that the Ministry of Education and Training conduct a wider survey for comments from scientific workers, educational managers and teachers, and the like.

(Extracted from the “Report on Investigating the Policy of Revising the Curriculum and Textbooks” by the Committee of Culture and Education for Youth and Pioneers).


- The primary curriculum has been prepared for students in the twenty-first century. The new teaching methodology is being implemented in experimental schools;
- The curriculum has concretized teaching methods so that they help teachers guide students; however, clearer guidelines should be given to teachers so they could flexibly apply them while teaching;
- In the experimental schools, some changes in teaching methods have positively affected students’ achievement. Nevertheless, the application of these methods is still limited. Mainly, teachers were still given too much explanation (giving lectures only);
- It needs to integrate local knowledge into teaching. The contents close to life should be integrated into one discipline.

(Summarizing the “Report on Evaluating the Year 2000 Primary Curriculum” by the international education experts, December 1999)

Comments of the Councils of Approving the Curricula for Primary and Lower Secondary Education:

- Generally, the curricula have been revised, meeting the demands of national development early in the twenty-first century;
- The curricula have combined the good points of the current curricula (traditional) with numerous new points, which keep up with the modern curricula;
- The point of view of curriculum revision is quite comprehensive, it includes goals/objectives, content, teaching methodology, instructional facilities and achievement assessment;
- However, the contents of some subjects are still overloaded, integration in some disciplines is impossible. The revision of teaching methods is not clear in some subjects; more attention should be paid to continuity in grade levels, disciplines, and to the addition of local knowledge to integrated content, etc.

(Summarizing the “Reports of All Councils of Approving Curricula for Primary and Lower Secondary Education”)

1.4d Research-based studies on the state and effectiveness of various aspects of the national curriculum and its implementation

To help improve the national curriculum and textbook development, some studies have been done. The following are some documents we have compiled for the national curriculum experimentation:

- Studying ways to improve the teaching methodology in both primary and lower secondary schools;
• Researching on revision of student assessment in both kinds of schools;
• Compiling experimental textbooks: Mathematics, Vietnamese language and moral education for primary education, and textbooks for all subjects in lower secondary schools;
• Developing experimental teachers’ books and exercise books accompanying the textbooks;
• Formulating national standards for all subjects from grades 1 to 9;
• Studying, comparing curricula of some key subjects with Vietnamese curriculum;
• Studying and building a program for teacher training;
• Studying the effectiveness of the new national curriculum and textbooks.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the National Curriculum and its Implementation**

1.5a *Strengths*

- The curriculum concentrates on the basic knowledge, skills appropriate to the cognition level of pupils;
- The curriculum responds to the needs of educational universalization for the majority of children and at the same time helps discover and nurture gifted pupils;
- The curriculum fosters the achievements of development of Vietnam national curriculum and of other countries so it can stabilize education and make revisions according to the level appropriate to the conditions and circumstances of the country.

1.5b *Weaknesses*

- The curriculum is in the process of changing from giving heavy emphasis on theory to emphasis on activities of practicing, utilizing and linking to actual life—from “static” curriculum into “dynamic” one;
- The continuity, interconnectedness, and integration in the curriculum are not given due attention, therefore there remains unnecessary overlaps and limitations in the cohesiveness of the contents of the different subjects;
- The curriculum has initially paid due attention to the teaching of learning how to learn (especially method of self-learning);

The primary, lower secondary curricula are in the pilot stage, therefore, there are still opportunities for readjustment in order to concentrate on the strengths, and overcome the weaknesses mentioned above.

1.6 *Draft and Ongoing Curriculum Reform Activities*

The draft of the new curriculum of basic education has been prepared since 1991 in the following manner:

- Evaluation of the existing curriculum (1991–1995), determine the strengths to be maintained and promoted, and weaknesses that have to be overcome.
- The draft of the new curriculum of basic education includes:

  a. Defining the objectives to be achieved at each level of education, at each area of learning and then based on these, a set of values will be established and
imparted to pupils in order to contribute to the training of the human resources for the development of the country;

b. Build a schedule for each level of education, including defining subjects, educational activities, time allocated for each subject, and for each activity.

- Design a curriculum framework including:
  a. Objectives to be achieved for each subject, each activity;
  b. Major contents (topics);
  c. Guide for the use of educational methods with appropriate means to attain the objectives;

- Set national standards for each subject according to the new curriculum, then organize the writing of textbooks and consider textbooks as a means for organizing a self-learning activity for pupils.

- Organize experimental teaching with new textbooks in twelve provinces representing mountain, rural, urban areas, northern, and southern zones.

  At the end of each school year, organize seminars to solicit comments on the curriculum, textbooks and teaching methods from teachers and administrators. Basing on these comments, adjustments will be made to perfect the curriculum before its nationwide implementation.

1.7 Summary and Conclusions

The Basic Education Curriculum will be implemented in nine educational levels (from grades 1 to 9) in Vietnam from now to the year 2010. This curriculum contributes to the reform in the primary and lower secondary education, expressed as follows:

- Contribute to the formation and development of the initial and important bases of the human personality in all its aspects: moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and basic skills;
- The curriculum content concentrates on the knowledge and skills that are basic, practical, close to life and lays emphasis on activities, the solving of problems close to the life of pupils;
- Implement the revision of teaching methods, encourage pupils to learn and carry out activities in a creative, active way so that they themselves can discover and acquire new knowledge, lay emphasis on the formation of self-learning method for pupils to develop individual abilities;
- The curriculum is implemented in the whole country under national standards to ensure equal opportunity for every child, and at the same time encourage teachers to implement the curriculum appropriate to the local conditions, to ensure feasibility of the curriculum;
- The curriculum is compiled according to the trends of development of Basic Education Curriculum of the region and the world, thus, contributing to the training of manpower to respond to the demands of the period of industrialization and modernization and world integration.

However, the Basic Education Curriculum of Vietnam is still in the process of trying to get out of the orbit of the traditional curriculum. Therefore, many results and goals for
integration of education contents or improvement of teaching methods and ways of assessing learning outcomes are only in the initial stages there are still limitations to be overcome.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

To develop basic education in Vietnam at present we have to resolve a number of contradictions: contradiction between the wish to attain the level of world and regional education and the low and poor socioeconomic development; contradictions between the purpose of equal education for everybody and the very uneven development among the provinces and areas; contradiction between the requirement of enhancing the quality of education and the inadequate amount of time for learning, poor facilities and learning/teaching materials.

This situation in the basic education in Vietnam serves as a rationale for the search for ways to develop so that it can both ensure the objective of Education for All and enhance step by step the quality of education.

It is expected that by the year 2010 basic education will be universalized throughout the country, the quality of education will achieve the objective of training people appropriate to the requirements of industrialization and modernization of the country.

With the principle of “lifelong learning” there should be very important changes in the objectives, contents, method and evaluation of quality of education according to the orientations of helping learners know how to learn. Thus, when completing lower secondary school they could practice self-learning and have a sense of lifelong learning in the higher levels, in vocational schools or in the world of work.

To integrate the four pillars of learning into the basic education curriculum, the new curriculum of primary and lower secondary education in Vietnam should hinge on the following:

- Select knowledge and skills, which are basic, practical and close to the life of the pupils.
- Strengthen the abilities of practicing, utilizing the knowledge and skills to solve the problems in real life.
- Build a system of new values, which includes thinking skills (creative problem solving, decision making, imagining, etc.) and the ability to adapt oneself to the conditions of modern society (mentally healthy, able to predict, know how to discover and solve the problems for development, the desire for learning and update of one’s knowledge).
- Lay emphasis on community skills, such as communicating, negotiating, leading, cooperating, adapting oneself to the diversity of culture and based on these binding altruism, love of peace, respect for others and readiness to help others, etc.

**Proposals**

The Basic Education Curriculum in Vietnam is being improved to approach the world trend of curriculum development and respond to the requirements of the country’s socioeconomic development in the face of the challenges of industrialization and modernization in Vietnam from now to the year 2020.

To continue to develop and finalize the Basic Education Curriculum, it is necessary to help the curriculum developers and textbook writers. Educational administrators of different levels should organize training workshops and seminars on the following issues:

- Experiences in integrating the four pillars of learning into Basic Education Curriculum;
• Interdisciplinarity in Basic Education Curriculum;
• Promotion of the practice and application of knowledge of Basic Education Curriculum to life;
• Improvement of assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes in primary and lower secondary levels;
• Experiences in using teaching methods for the active learning of pupils.