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# Educational Philosophy in Vietnam in the Context of Educational Reform and Sustainable Development

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**ABSTRACT:** In the context of globalisation, digital transformation, and the growing demand for sustainable development, educational philosophy plays an increasingly significant role in shaping the values, objectives, and organisational principles of national education systems. Grounded in UNESCO's conception of education as a lifelong human right, articulated through four fundamental pillars—learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be—this paper examines key theoretical and practical issues of educational philosophy in contemporary Vietnam. Drawing on a critical review of both international and Vietnamese approaches to educational philosophy, the study clarifies the role of educational philosophy in Vietnam's ongoing comprehensive educational reform. It particularly emphasises the importance of applied philosophy in shaping value orientation, the cultivation of critical thinking, ethical awareness, and social responsibility among learners. Furthermore, the paper situates Vietnamese educational philosophy within a broader dialogue with global educational thought, in line with UNESCO's World Philosophy Initiative. The findings affirm that educational philosophy constitutes an indispensable intellectual foundation for the humanistic and sustainable development of education in Vietnam today.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational philosophy, UNESCO, Vietnamese education, humanism, sustainable development, dialogue.

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## Introduction

Philosophy, as a discipline concerned with the most general laws of nature, society, and human thought, has long served as a foundational framework for human cognition and action. In the field of education, philosophy does not merely reflect on existing practices but also actively shapes them by addressing fundamental questions about the aims, values, methods, and social significance of teaching and learning. Educational philosophy thus emerges as a form of self-reflection through which education becomes conscious of its own purposes and missions.

In the era of the knowledge economy and digital transformation, knowledge is rapidly changing while technology increasingly permeates all aspects of social life. Education consequently faces the risk of being reduced to a technocratic or instrumental enterprise focused solely on workforce preparation. Against this backdrop, educational philosophy provides an essential intellectual anchor, enabling dialogue between tradition and modernity, humanistic ideals and technological realities, individual creativity and the concept of a learning society.

UNESCO's establishment of World Philosophy Day underscores philosophy as a shared space for humanity to reflect on peace, justice, and sustainable development. Educational philosophy, therefore, transcends academic discourse and becomes a guiding framework for educational action at the global level. For Vietnam, currently undergoing comprehensive educational reform, the study and application of educational philosophy are not merely theoretical pursuits but urgent practical necessities.

The absence of such a systematic analysis raises several critical questions:

1. To what extent is Vietnamese educational reform philosophically aligned with global educational values?
2. How are core concepts such as humanism, sustainability, and holistic development articulated in official policy discourse?
3. Does Vietnamese educational philosophy demonstrate compatibility, tension, or selective adaptation in relation to UNESCO's humanistic framework?

Addressing these questions is essential not only for academic scholarship but also for ensuring that reform efforts are grounded in a coherent and sustainable philosophical foundation.

## Research Focus

This study examines the philosophical foundations embedded in key Vietnamese educational policy documents and compares them with UNESCO's educational framework. The research emphasises value orientation, human development models, and sustainability principles as core analytical dimensions.

## Research Questions

1. How are educational values and philosophical principles articulated in major Vietnamese educational policy documents?
2. To what extent do these principles correspond to UNESCO's four pillars of education?
3. What areas of convergence, divergence, or contextual adaptation can be identified?
4. What implications do these findings have for the sustainable development of Vietnamese education?

## Data Sources

The study analyses the following primary documents:

- Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW (2013) on fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training
- Conclusion No. 51-KL/TW (2019)
- Decision No. 89/QD-TTg (2023)
- Resolution 71 (2025) on educational reform
- UNESCO's Four Pillars of Education
- UNESCO Education 2030 Framework

These documents were selected based on their normative authority and direct relevance to educational reform and sustainable development in Vietnam.

## Literature review and theoretical framework

Throughout intellectual history, education has been intrinsically linked to philosophy. From Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in the Western tradition to Confucius and Mencius in Eastern thought, education has been regarded as a pathway to moral cultivation, rational development, and human flourishing. In modern and contemporary periods, educational philosophy has been deeply influenced by Enlightenment ideals, humanism, and freedom, as exemplified in the works of Kant, Dewey, and Freire. Contemporary educational philosophy has expanded toward humanistic, ethical, and emancipatory approaches that emphasise learners as active agents in constructing knowledge. UNESCO's four pillars of education have become a widely accepted theoretical foundation for sustainable education strategies worldwide. In Vietnam, educational philosophy has evolved in close connection with Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the humanistic traditions of Eastern philosophy. Concepts such as lifelong learning, holistic human development, and education as a means of nation-building reflect a consistent emphasis on human-centred development. In recent

decades, Vietnamese scholars have increasingly adopted an open, integrative approach, combining national traditions with international educational theories.

## **Research findings and discussion**

### Applied philosophy and value orientation in Vietnamese education

Based on the preceding theoretical analysis, this study argues that applied philosophy and value orientation play a pivotal role in defining the objectives, methods, and meanings of education in contemporary Vietnam. Educational philosophy enables education not only to transmit knowledge but also to cultivate personality, critical thinking, and ethical ideals. In a globalised context, applied philosophy provides a framework for selecting appropriate values that harmonise national traditions with international standards, thereby promoting humanistic, open, and sustainable educational development. In Vietnam, a humanistic value orientation is clearly reflected in educational goals aligned with sustainable development, particularly in the pursuit of equity, inclusiveness, and quality education for all. The construction of a learning society exemplifies applied philosophy in practice, where knowledge functions as a means of human emancipation rather than merely an instrument of production. This orientation resonates strongly with Ho Chi Minh's educational philosophy, which emphasised learning for work, personal development, and service to humanity.

Without a solid value foundation, applied philosophy risks degenerating into technocracy, prioritising short-term efficiency over human development. In education, this tendency manifests in excessive emphasis on rankings, metrics, and measurable achievements at the expense of moral cultivation and meaningful learning. Applied educational philosophy counters this trend by restoring education to its human core—where individuals are educated not only to work but also to live meaningful and responsible lives. Moreover, applied philosophy is closely connected to ethical considerations in education, particularly in the digital age. Issues such as data privacy, equitable access, and the impact of artificial intelligence on human development demand philosophical reflection. Educational philosophy thus provides Vietnam with ethical principles for navigating digital learning environments grounded in respect, human dignity, and social responsibility.

### Dialogue between Vietnamese educational philosophy and global thought in the spirit

Building on the role of applied philosophy, this section situates Vietnamese educational philosophy within a broader dialogue with contemporary global thought, as advocated by UNESCO. From this perspective, educational philosophy becomes a platform for intercultural dialogue that enables integration without loss of identity. UNESCO emphasises humanism, openness, academic freedom, and social responsibility as core educational values. Engaging in dialogue with these global principles allows Vietnamese educational philosophy to reaffirm its relevance while contributing indigenous perspectives rooted in national culture and historical experience. Educational philosophy, therefore, bears responsibility for guiding action in response to global challenges such as social

inequality, environmental crises, and the ethical implications of technological advancement. In line with PWorld philosophy Day, educational philosophy must serve not only to interpret the world but also to orient human action toward peace, justice, and sustainable development.

### **Implications and contributions**

The study yields several significant theoretical and practical implications. First, it reaffirms the foundational role of educational philosophy in Vietnam's educational reform, arguing that reforms lacking philosophical grounding risk becoming fragmented and technocratic. Second, it systematises and connects Vietnamese educational philosophy with UNESCO's universal educational values, highlighting their compatibility rather than opposition. Third, the paper advances an applied philosophical framework that translates abstract values into concrete educational orientations, particularly in cultivating critical thinking, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. Finally, by positioning Vietnamese educational philosophy within a global dialogue, the study contributes to broader discussions on education as a driver of humanistic and sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

In the contemporary context marked by globalisation, digital transformation, and the growing imperative of sustainable development, educational philosophy emerges as a crucial intellectual foundation for rethinking the aims, values, and directions of national education systems. This study has demonstrated that educational reform in Vietnam cannot be reduced to technical adjustments in curricula, governance, or technology, but must be grounded in a coherent philosophical framework that places human development at its core. By examining both theoretical traditions and practical challenges, the paper highlights the indispensable role of educational philosophy in orienting Vietnam's comprehensive educational reform toward humanistic, inclusive, and sustainable goals. Drawing on UNESCO's conception of education as a lifelong human right articulated through the four pillars of learning, the study shows that Vietnamese educational philosophy—rooted in Marxist-Leninist philosophy, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and Eastern humanism—remains fundamentally compatible with contemporary global educational values. Rather than existing in tension, these traditions can engage in constructive dialogue that enriches educational thought and practice in Vietnam today. A central contribution of this study lies in its emphasis on applied philosophy as a mechanism for translating abstract values into concrete educational orientations. Applied educational philosophy provides a value compass to help prevent education from being instrumentalised or technocratized, especially in the digital age. It supports the cultivation of critical thinking, ethical awareness, and social responsibility, thereby reaffirming education as a process of human formation rather than mere workforce preparation.

Furthermore, by situating Vietnamese educational philosophy within a broader global dialogue in the spirit of UNESCO's World Philosophy Day, the paper underscores the contemporary responsibility of philosophy to respond to pressing global challenges such as social inequality, technological

disruption, and sustainability crises. In this sense, educational philosophy is not only reflective but also normative and transformative, guiding educational systems toward peace, justice, and long-term human development. In conclusion, the study affirms that strengthening educational philosophy—particularly in its applied and dialogical dimensions—is a necessary condition for the success and sustainability of educational reform in Vietnam. Educational philosophy should therefore be recognised as a strategic intellectual resource that enables education to address the fundamental questions of the present era: education for whom, for what purpose, and according to which values. Such a philosophical reorientation is essential for building an education system that is not only effective and innovative but also deeply humanistic and responsive to the challenges of the contemporary world.

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