Vietnam and the Problem of Embeddedness

Contributions to the Political Economy of Learning

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Annual Conference of the Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) Programme
22 September 2020, Virtually From Leiden University & Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford
Key Questions

• How?
  – How is Vietnam’s education system performing?

• Why?
  – Features of Vietnam, education system, accountability relations

• So what?
  – What can Vietnam, world gain from systems approach?
Multiple Countervailing Accountabilities

• High levels of sustained political commitment
  • Robust public spending, redistribution across provinces, consistent attention

• Promotion of professionalism within bureaucracy and schools
  • Perpetual political processes around the CPV

• High levels of societal involvement in education
  • Societal investment, societal engagement
How?
Vietnam’s performance around learning

• Impressive gains suggestive of possibilities
  – Enrollments, achievement*, assessments of learning

• High performing, but room for improvement, often brutal
  – Pernicious inequalities, inequities around access, quality

• Vietnam does well, can do better still
  – Systems diagnostic of education system as socially embedded
Figure 1. PISA test scores vs. country income level, 2015.
Source: PISA database and World Bank’s WDI database.
Vietnam: net enrolment rate from age 5 - 25
2012

92% of 12-year olds are in school

Only 46% of 18-year olds are still there
Why?
Systems thinking

By examining an education system as a whole, we can see how its components are not working together to produce learning.

The systems approach

Just as we can describe the economy as interactions between producers and consumers, we can describe an education system as a series of interactions between different actors. Education systems are made up of the complex interactions among people (teachers, students, parents, and administrators) and things (curricula, books, schools).

This is why ‘common sense’ solutions may not always work: the same intervention may have very different effects in different systems.

Two crucial questions

A systems perspective on education first asks: why are learning outcomes poor in this school, district, or country? Once that question gets answered, a systems thinker asks: why do those conditions which we have identified as causing low learning exist?

Once we understand why our education system isn’t producing learning, then we can work to realign the relationships in our system to be coherent for learning, meaning that every component works together as a whole with the goal of improving learning.

For more, see our list of RISE research on systems thinking.
Research on Improving Systems of Education

• Features of countries' education system

• Features of politics, political commitments, public governance

• Features of accountability relations

Coherence for learning
Research on the Political Economy of Education and Learning

Africa Studies

Global Case Studies
Sóc Trăng, 2008
The Grand Question

Which features of politics, accountability relations, institutions… have shaped goals, evolution, and performance…. of VN’s education system (1985-2020)

Particularly with respect to learning
Research Methods

• Historical sociological, extended case approach * PET-A framework
  • Deep explorations of embeddedness of education systems, learning

• Process tracing evolution of VN’s education system
  • Extensive documents and policy review spanning four decades and beyond

• Data collection, analysis ← RISE, SABER, Levy, Hickey, Hossain etc.
  • 76 in-depth interviews at central and local levels,
  • National level + three Vietnam provinces, districts, communes, and schools
  • System coherence/incoherence for learning
Social embeddedness of Education system

1. Political commitments of CPV re education, learning

2. Features of accountability relations

3. Societal participation in the education system
   - Societal investment, societal engagement
Conjecture 1

Party politics
Conjecture 1: Party Politics

- Presence of CPV means perpetual political process within system
  - Runs parallel with policy implementation, service delivery

- Affecting all relations within education system
  - Lends force to accountability within and across organizations

- Political priorities within education system addressed regularly
  - Political, career incentives for principals, teachers
Conjecture 2

Societal investments
Public expenditure on education, Southeast Asia

VN’s Law stipulates 20% of annual budget must go to education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Public Expenditure on Education</th>
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<td>Cambodia</td>
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*Tự nguyện phụ huynh thu đẹp nổi cho giáo viên chủ nhiệm trong tháng 9 để thanh toán với nhà trường để không bị ảnh hưởng đến thi đua của lớp*
Conjecture 2: Societal Investments

• Circumstances in late 1980s, early 1990s → co-payments
  • “Societalization” → three-decades’ effort at resource mobilization
  • Investments in education by households in a literal sense

→ At best: “You get what you pay for” → At worst: Costly, unfair
→ Irony: Weakness/limit of system at times lever of accountability

* Not to be romanticized, also a lever of inequality
Conjecture 3
Societal engagement
PHẢN ĐỐI BILL GATES SCHOOL
Skoń CHỨC HỌC THÊM NGOÀI GIỜ

BILL GATES SCHOOL KHÔNG TỒN TRONG
PHÚ HUYNH VÀ HỌC SINH

PHẢN ĐỐI BILL GATES SCHOOL
để CHỨC HỌC THÊM NGOÀI GIỜ
Lỗi dùng chức vụ, quyền hạn trong thi hành công vụ

Lo Văn Huỳnh
(nguyên Trưởng phòng Khảo thí và Quản lý chất lượng giáo dục)
21 năm tù

Nguyễn Thị Hồng Nga
(nguyên chuyên viên Phòng Khảo thí và Quản lý chất lượng giáo dục)
19 năm 6 tháng tù

Cẩm Thị Bun Sơn
(nguyên Phó Trưởng phòng Chính trị tư tưởng, Sở GD&ĐT tỉnh Sơn La)
10 năm tù

Trần Xuân Yên
(nguyên PGĐ Sở GD&ĐT tỉnh Sơn La)
9 năm tù

Đặng Hữu Thụy
(nguyên Phó hiệu trưởng Trường THPT Tố Hiệu)
8 năm tù

Nguyễn Thanh Nhàn
(nguyên Phó hiệu trưởng Phòng Khảo thí và Quản lý chất lượng giáo dục)
2 năm 6 tháng tù

Đỗ Khắc Hưng
(nguyên cán bộ Phòng An ninh chính trị nội bộ, CA tỉnh Sơn La)
3 năm tù treo

Dinh Hải Sơn
(nguyên cán bộ Phòng An ninh chính trị nội bộ, CA tỉnh Sơn La)
2 năm tù treo
Conjecture 3: Societal Engagement

*Broad civic engagement brings an additional element of accountability*

- Vibrant education “public sphere”
- State media plays a clear role, from the central to local levels
- New Media: education sector scandals as staple of “Vietnam political diet”
- Public calls for transparency bring pressure to bear
Teachers: Caught in the Middle

• Highly respected in principle, and key target of reforms

• Meager salaries $\rightarrow$ extra teaching $\rightarrow$ diminished status

• Pressures from all corners: parents, (at times corrupt) authorities

• Evaluated, overloaded w/teaching, admin, political work
Mulitple Countervailing Accountabilities

- Conjecture 1, regarding political commitments of CPV
  - Political leadership, countervailing political force

- Conjecture 2, regarding “societalization”
  - Contributions from society sometimes enhances accountability

- Conjecture 3 – Societal engagement
  - Civic engagement encourage a culture of accountability
PARTY
GOVERNMENT/STATE
LOCAL AUTHORITIES

SCHOOLS
School management, teachers

COMMUNITY
Parents, students, communities

Societal Buy In

Public Engagement

Political Commitment & Party Politics
So What?
Significance

• Account for sources, limits of VN’s performance on learning

• Prospective contributions to enhancing policy effectiveness
  • Subnational diversity in policies/practices, e.g. finance, EMIS

• Contribute to research on political economy of education
Systems Thinking Subnationally

• Why are learning outcomes strong, weak?

• Why do conditions accounting for performance exist?

• What explains system coherence/incoherence for learning?

• Features of accountability (esp political aspect) in provinces
Exploring Subnational Diversity in Politics

• Political priorities across, within provinces
  • Alignment with national policy goals

• Finance, school support
  • Features of education finance within system, budgets,

• Education management and information systems (EMIS)
  • Use of information systems across, within provinces
Exploring Subnational Diversity

• Comprehensive, well elaborated policies
  • But large gaps with ‘conditions on ground’

• Political commitment, ritual and real
  • Finance, equity but also inequities, e.g. opportunities

• Fragmented, decentralized, varied system
  • Unwieldy distribution of responsibilities
Multiple Countervailing Accountabilities

• Modes of education system politics
  • What sorts/aspects of political processes can promote coherence?

• Modes of societal investment
  • Under what conditions public, private buy-in beget accountability

• Modes of societal engagement
  • When/how does civic engagement encourage accountability
An Approach for an Embedded Analysis

- Distilling key insights from RISE research internationally
- Extending accountabilities research to new contexts
- Leveraging deep understandings of specific contexts
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