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Brokering Teacher Training in Vietnam's Early Childhood and Vocational Education Sectors

A Story of Educational Expansion and Para-State Entrepreneurship in the Đổi Mới Economy

Anne Raffin

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IRASEC (USR CNRS 3142 - UMIFRE 22)

179 Thanon Witthayu
Lumphini, Pathum Wan
Bangkok 10330
Thailand

Tel : (66) 026 70 42 91

Fax : (66) 026 70 42 90

Website: www.irasec.com

Email: contact@irasec.com

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Brokering Teacher Training in Vietnam's Early Childhood and Vocational Education Sectors: A Story of Educational Expansion and Para-State Entrepreneurship in the *Đổi Mới* Economy

Anne Raffin

Key words: market socialism, educational discourse, outsourcing teacher training, the global economy and ASEAN.

Introduction

In the wake of the economic reforms of Vietnam's *Đổi mới*, or 'renovation', in 1986, the country has intensified its integration into the global economy in recent decades. Vietnam's educational system has likewise undergone a rapid transformation in response to and contributing to such integration. The country has been praised for its committed effort to advance access to primary education to all, and the enrolment of students in upper secondary and higher education for those born after 1980 has witnessed a sharp increase¹.

Another aspect of Vietnam's socio-economic opening has been the country's greater exposure to international discourse about the importance of educational sectors that are seen to contribute to human capital development and labour force enhancement. Both early childhood education and vocational education, as part of Vietnam's educational ecosystem, have only recently received more attention from the government. In this regard, the evolving labour market is increasingly requiring workers with skills that are not only higher technical, but also cognitive and behavioural. In its recent report on Vietnam, the World Bank stresses the idea that equipping higher-skilled workers with the right cognitive and behavioural skills starts at the pre-school level².

The result has been a willingness on the part of the Vietnamese state to 'plug the gap' and expand these sectors in response to such imperatives. While the government has long recognized the importance of primary and secondary education for Socialist nation-building, its recent focus

¹ The World Bank, "Skilling Up Vietnam: Preparing the workforce for a modern market economy: Vietnam Development Report 2014", November 2013, p. 36 (http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/11/26/000461832_20131126115640/Rendered/PDF/829400AR0P13040Box0379879B00PUBLIC0.pdf), retrieved on April 22, 2014.

² "Skilling Up Vietnam," *op.cit.* p. 15.

on early childhood and vocational education conveys a sense of the need to catch up with the development required by a socialist market economy. Consequently, growth in the latter areas exhibits reliance on outside resources and expertise, as well as a tendency towards some degree of *ad hoc* operation.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, it traces how it became seen as necessary to develop these educational sectors within Vietnam's increasingly competitive and outward-looking economy. Secondly, it recounts an example of such '*ad hoc*' operations by examining the motives and opportunity by which a Vietnamese company has made successful bids on government contracts to organize training for preschool teachers and vocational teachers.

The case study illustrates how, despite increasing pressure towards openness and marketization, the internally generated responses to these targeted expansions of the education sector rely on heavy state linkages and self-preservation of the company above other concerns. Thus, both the conditions for the expansion of these educational sectors and the means by which the demand for expansion was met reflect aspects of Vietnam's *Đổi mới* economy as it continues to transform.

Expansion: Early Childhood Education (Giáo dục mầm non)

Since the Vietnamese government has been aiming at developing a competitive multi-sector economy, it needs a well-trained labour force to meet the challenges of the labour market. However, since the early 1990s, the Vietnamese state had to withdraw from its commitment to the principles of universalism in education, effected through the new constitution of 1992, which lacks guarantee of access to education for all. This was the result of a serious economic and financial crisis in the 1980s, when the government reduced its expenditure as a means to control inflation³. Still, education continues to be funded by the government, although user fees (both formal and informal) remain high⁴.

As part of its effort to improve the overall educational system, Vietnam joined the Education for All (EFA) international movement under the leadership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization United (UNESCO), which seeks to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults by the year 2015, as well as enable young children below primary school age to get access to education. As a result, Vietnam has been the recipient of various aid programmes intended not only to expand education, but also to strengthen educational standards. The government used the 1990 World Declaration on EFA as a framework to attract educational aid. This framework was built around three broad areas, one of which included early childhood education. Subsequently, by the late 1990s, international donors had become involved in Vietnam⁵. For instance, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) implemented an "In-service Teacher Improvement Programme" for teachers in ten target provinces during 2004-2007⁶. Hence, internationalization via international donors and aid agency-sponsored teacher training has been a means to improve teachers' qualifications.

³ Nolwen Henaff, Jean-Yves Martin, "Introduction", *Travail, emploi et ressources au Viêt Nam: Quinze ans de Renouveau*, Paris: IRD Editions et Karthala, 2003, p. 17.

⁴ Adam Fforde, "Economics, History, and the Origins of Vietnam's Post-War Economic Success", *Asian Survey*, vol. 49, n. 3, 2009, p. 487.

⁵ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, National Education for All (EFA), Action Plan 2003-2015, Hanoi: National Assembly, 2003, p. 7 (<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/EASTASIAPACIFICEXT/VIETNAMEXTN/0,,contentMDK:20212123~pagePK:141137~piPK:217854~theSitePK:387565,00.html>), retrieved on May 20, 2013.

⁶ Takashi Hamano, "Educational reform and teacher education in Vietnam," *Journal of Education for Teaching: International research and pedagogy*, vol. 34, n. 4, 2008, p. 407.

The EFA was partially based on Vietnam's "Education Development Strategic Plan" (EDS) for 2001-2010⁷. Faced with several problems, among which the shortage of teachers at all levels of education and subjects, the poor qualification of teachers, and finally, badly equipped teacher training institutes with obsolete facilities and training methods as well as a lack of quality training materials, the Educational Development Strategic Plan outlined measures to build updated teacher institutes and created the Hanoi University of Education in 1999 to train teachers and do research in the field of education⁸. One of the strategic goals of the EFA plan is for the educational system to evolve from quantity to quality. For the materialization of this aim, actions programmes are needed to redesign the curriculum as well as to train teachers more effectively⁹. For instance, one idea is to endorse a new curriculum based on 'child-centred learning', as Vietnamese teachers had previously been trained to dispense knowledge unidirectionally from teacher to student, rather than employing more interactive methods. Hence, the re-training of teachers plays a key role in preparing students for a knowledge-based economy based on problem-solving and individual initiative.

Kindergartens: It is believed that students' training should start at the kindergarten level for optimal educational results. Kindergartens are not a novelty in Vietnam, since they already existed a few decades ago. The kindergarten movement and its philosophy, which started in Germany with Friederich Froebel (1782-1852), have spread to other places around the world, including Vietnam¹⁰.

First, under French colonialism, a weeklong kindergarten existed in Hanoi, before being expanded as an educational space after 1945. Under the Socialist government, children attended kindergartens (called Trẻ mẫu giáo) to receive a training that, in addition to facilitating their entrance to the first grade, would prepare them to become good citizens of the socialist regime. Such goals were already articulated in a decree issued in August 1946 as part of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), or North Vietnam, which drew up the DRV's basic education principles¹¹. During the First Indochina War (1946-1954) and the Second Indochina War (1965-1972), Vietnamese officials regarded kindergartens as a means to release women from home in response to wartime and economic development necessities. After the reunification of Vietnam in 1975, they underlined the growth of kindergarten education as preparing children for the first grade through a teacher-centred method of teaching¹². Hence, early childhood education was not longer seen as out-of-home socialization but rather as part of lifelong learning¹³. Since the Đổi Mới renovation, public and private spending on kindergarten education has risen with the economic growth of the country, but public expenditure on early education is still minor in comparison with that for primary or secondary education. According to London, in 2011 there were only some 3,000 kindergartens (of which approximately 70 percent were public) and roughly 9,000 nursery schools (35 percent of which are 'people-founded', i.e. not-for-profit institutions that are owned, managed and mostly funded by non-government organizations, private associations or firms)¹⁴.

Hence, one of the targeted groups of the EFA Plan are children in the 0-5 year-old age group, i.e. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The objectives of ECCE are to reach all 0-5 year-

⁷ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, National Education for All (EFA), p. 33.

⁸ Nguyen Chi Thanh, "Training High Qualified Teachers in Vietnam: Challenges and Policy Issues," 2011, pp. 200-203, (http://home.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/cice/publications/sosho4_2-16.pdf), retrieved on May 20, 2013.

⁹ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, National Education for All (EFA), pp. xxix, xxxi.

¹⁰ Froebel believed that children were not sinful humans who needed to be tamed, but rather essentially good beings who required being educated through specific tasks to teach them particular skills and moral lessons. Roberta Wollons, "Introduction: On the International Diffusion, Politics, and Transformation of the Kindergarten," Roberta Wollons, (ed.), *Kindergartens and Cultures: The Global Diffusion of an Idea*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 2.

¹¹ Thaveeporn Vasakul, "Managing the Young Anarchists: Kindergartens and National Culture in Postcolonial Vietnam," *Kindergartens and Cultures*, p. 216.

¹² Thaveeporn Vasakul, "Managing the Young Anarchists," *op. cit.* p. 222.

¹³ Dang Phuong Thao and Wendy Anne Boyd, "Renovating early childhood education pedagogy: a case study in Vietnam", *International Journal of Early Years of Education*, published online 29 April 2014, p. 7.

¹⁴ Jonathan London, "Education in Vietnam: Historical Roots, Recent Trends", Jonathan London (ed.), *Education in Viet Nam*, Singapore: ISEAS Press, 2011, p. 33.

old children through ECCE programmes, to offer one-year quality pre-school education for all 5 year-old children, to enhance services aimed at promoting all-round child development, to craft a national policy for affordable and quality ECCE, and to improve ECCE management capacity at the local level¹⁵. More precisely, the EFA Plan wants to expand a new curriculum and programmes for a one-year primary school readiness programme for 5 year-olds based on child-centred learning and 'learning through play methodologies' thanks to, among other factors, better trained teachers¹⁶. The EFA Plan hopes to have by 2015 a "quality of the teaching-learning process [which] will be at the level of modern international standards."¹⁷

A key challenge in meeting this goal is the need to train highly qualified teachers. In 2006, there was a shortage of about 80,000 teachers at the pre-primary level. In addition, among pre-primary teachers, only 51.1 percent were fully qualified teachers in 2006¹⁸.

Another challenge is the lack of pedagogical literature available in Vietnam on child psychology, Montessori and other alternative learning methods. A decade ago, one scholar noted that: "books and materials related to teaching methodology are very rare in any language in Vietnam"¹⁹. Since then, some bookstores in the larger cities have responded to the demands of their middle-class customers to know more about educational pedagogy and now offer books on Montessori methods in the Vietnamese language. Foreign books, such as the method of Professor Feng De Quan who is considered 'the Father of Early Childhood Education in China' and works by Glenn Doman, such as *How to Teach your Baby to Read*, have also been translated into Vietnamese and offer popularized versions of early childhood education theories and methods.

As Newberry has argued for Indonesia, deliberations about training kindergarten teachers in Vietnam have been also influenced by global ideas. The new attention to early childhood is due in part to the global discourse on optimal child development, including ideas about the importance of teaching English, the language of internationalization, at an early age²⁰. Hence, the development of children's English language abilities has become part of Vietnamese officials' thinking and policies. In 2011, Vietnam adopted the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to measure the competency of their English language teachers, in line with the objective that all young people leaving school by 2020 should have a good grasp of the language²¹. This explains the decision by the country's Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to train kindergarten teachers in the English language. Such measures also echo the World Bank's push since 2000 for more attention to the early years of child development and the recent promotion of the concept of 'school readiness', i.e. a child entering primary school is more likely to do well thanks to quality pre-schooling which nurtures cognitive (problem solving abilities) and social (soft) skills. While the Vietnamese government intends to promote school readiness for 3 to 6 year-olds, the World Bank continues to push for more attention to be given to children aged 0 to 3 years-old²².

Expansion: Vocational Training (Giáo dục dạy nghề): Another sub-sector of education in which shortcomings need to be addressed is vocational education. The ten-year period after the beginning of the Đổi Mới witnessed the decline of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Vietnam, with the number of vocational training schools dropping from 279 in 1987 to 129 in 1998. The closing down of many state-owned enterprises or worker lay-offs led to a reduced demand for

¹⁵ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, National Education for All (EFA), p. 35.

¹⁶ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, National Education for All (EFA), p. 58.

¹⁷ Socialist Republic of Vietnam, National Education for All (EFA), p. 84.

¹⁸ Nguyen Thanh Hoan, "Teacher Training in Vietnam", *Human Rights Education in Asian Schools*, vol. IX, 2006, pp. 11 and 8, (http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/human_rights_education_in_asian_schools/section2/2006/03/teacher-training-in-vietnam.html), retrieved on March 14, 2014.

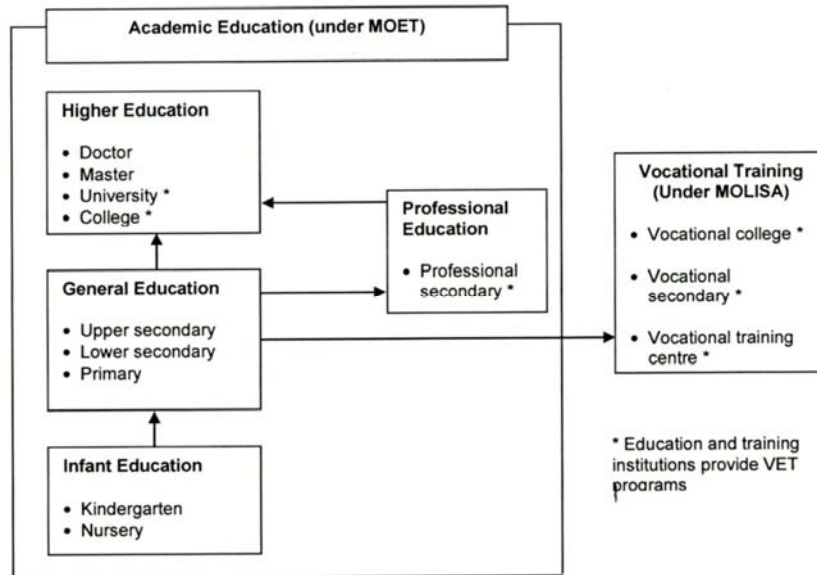
¹⁹ Ngyuen Xuan Thu, "Education in Vietnam: An Overview", in Nguyen Xuan Thu (ed.), *Vietnamese Studies in a Multicultural World*, Melbourne: Vietnamese Language & Culture Publications, 1994, p. 239.

²⁰ Jan Newberry, "Durable Assemblage: Early childhood Education in Indonesia", *Working Paper Series*, n. 194, Singapore: Asian Research Institute, December 2012, p. 5.

²¹ Ed Parks, "Vietnam demands English language teaching 'miracle'", *Guardian Weekly*, 8 November 2011.

²² The World Bank, "Skilling Up Vietnam: Preparing the workforce for a modern market economy: Vietnam Development Report 2014", November 2013, p. 19.

vocational trainees. The government instead focused on secondary and tertiary education, believed to be the strategic sectors in meeting the knowledge economy needs. Later, however, the influx of foreign investments again led to increasing demands for more highly vocational skilled workers to which the VET was unable to respond. In 1998, responsibility for vocational training oversight was transferred from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA).



Source: Education Law (2005) and the Law on Vocational Training (2006).

Under MOLISA, the training system has to offer training at the elementary, intermediate and college levels (see graph above).

Since 2001, the government has been focusing on strengthening the VET system in order to increase the workforce with professional technical qualifications. The number of students in technological schools receiving vocational training is expected to increase by ten percent annually²³. Nguyen Thanh Hoan noted a shortage of teachers for technical education. In 2006, there were 19,000 technical teachers. Larger organizations report that they will require some 60-70,000 workers by 2020, 80 percent of which would need to be trained at least at an intermediate level²⁴. Given that every year, about one million Vietnamese shift from the agricultural sector to the industry and service sectors, the demand for vocational training is continuously increasing²⁵. One answer to this problem is provided by various multilateral and bilateral donors who have given technical and vocational assistance to VET since the late 1990s. For instance, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), France, Japan and the Nordic countries assisted with MOLISA's Vocational and Technical Education Project (1998 to 2008) which led to the creation of 15 schools²⁶. However, vocational training is perceived by society at large as less prestigious than higher education. As a result, the current share of 19-21 years-olds entering vocational fields has remained stagnant since 1998²⁷.

²³ "Vocational Education & Training in Vietnam Background," p. 1 (<https://aei.gov.au/International-network/vietnam/publications/Documents/VET%20Background%20-%20for%20AEI%20website.pdf>), retrieved on 17 April 2014.

²⁴ Nguyen Thanh Hoan, "Teacher Training in Vietnam," p. 11 and "VET Demand", (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-skills-for-employability-vietnam-country-vet-demand.htm>), retrieved on 30 April 2014.

²⁵ "VET Demand."

²⁶ "Vocational Education & Training in Vietnam Background", p. 3.

²⁷ "Skilling Up Vietnam," p. 23. Pham & Fry, "Vietnam as an outlier," Colin Brock & Lorraine Pe Symaco, eds., *Education in South-East Asia*, Oxford, UK: Symposium Books, Ltd, 2011, p. 234.

The draft Vocational Training Development Strategy for 2011-2020 aims to have 27.5 million of Vietnamese receive vocational training to respond to the need of the local and international markets. In order to train such a large number of people, the network of vocational training institutions is expected to grow to 230 Vocational Colleges (in 2008, there were 92 VCs), 310 Vocational Secondary Schools (in 2008, 214 VSSs) and 1,050 Vocational Training Centres (in 2008, 684 VTCs) by 2020²⁸.

There is also a strong need to improve the content area of professional level training to not only teach theoretical knowledge, but also practical skills, as well as to equip students with relevant skills to use modern technology effectively. Investors and employers have complained of a severe shortage of skilled Vietnamese workers able to handle advanced technology. Correspondingly there is a need to update the machinery and techniques taught in some vocational schools so that employers will not need to retrain the graduates upon entering the workforce²⁹.

One response to the lack of practical training has been a key innovation in the curriculum after the Đổi Mới to introduce a 'work and study system'. This model highlights that 'work must be productive' and 'not theoretical'. Thus schools need to create collaborative programmes with enterprises to allow students and teachers to gain experience in real production factories³⁰. This shift was the result of a 1991 study conducted by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO, which stressed the "poor linkages between vocational technical education, production and employment"³¹.

It is within this context demanding the nurturing of cognitive and behavioural skills at the pre-school level and the need for more people with relevant technical skills that our case study takes place.

Para-State Entrepreneurship: a Case Study of Enterprise Global Vietnam's Involvement in Teacher Training

The case study presented here recounts the early-stage ventures of one Vietnamese company attempting to diversify its business opportunities into the field of education, specifically in the area of teacher training.

The company under study, created in the late 1990s, will be herein called Enterprise Global-Vietnam. To protect the anonymity of the business under study here, a pseudonym is used. Within the context discussed in the previous sections, Enterprise Global-Vietnam is part of a larger strategy to respond to the pressures of marketization through targeted educational expansion in the early childhood and vocational education sectors. The company has offered overseas training to vocational teachers stressing how study must go hand-in-hand with practice. It has also arranged offering training in the language of globalization, English, for kindergarten teachers in a neighbouring country. Both are types of 'internationalizing' teacher training which stands in stark contrast with internationalization via international donors and aid agencies.

In fact, so far the teacher training provided by this company is in many ways marginal: the number of teachers undergoing such training remains low, at least at this stage, and education itself represents only one aspect of what this company does in its range of economic pursuits. Finally, the effects of the training thus far also appear to be marginal, as training itself was held in

²⁸ "National VET Strategy", (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learning-skills-for-employability-vietnam-country-national-vet-strategy.htm>), retrieved on 30 April 2014.

²⁹ "Skilling Up Vietnam", p. 126.

³⁰ Pham Thi Hong Thanh, "Doi Moi (Renovation) and Higher Education in Vietnam," *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 2011, vol. 20, n. 3, p. 216.

³¹ Stephan Duggan, "Educational reform in Vietnam: A Process of Change or Continuity?" *Comparative Education*, vol. 37, n. 2, May 2001, p. 196.

a neighbouring country, Malaysia, and the calibre of the teacher training associated with the company's ventures is unlikely to lead to dramatic levels of teacher improvement.

What then makes the study of this company worthwhile? This paper aims to argue that there is something to be learned about how Vietnam functions as a transitional society, with its own patterns of state-centric, partially decentralized and internationalized responses to the pressures and demands of globalization, in the very dimensions of marginality just described.

Despite Vietnam's Socialist allegiance, markets existed in North Vietnam even prior to 1975-1976 (the year marking the reunification of the US-supported southern Republic of Vietnam with Communist North Vietnam)³². The crucial implementation of the Decree 15-CP, in early 1981, legalized state-owned enterprises (SOE) to participate in markets for products that SOEs intended to produce. Liberalization emerged from within the planned economy first by virtue of legalized market access for SOEs through the trend of equitization, which took off around the year 2000³³. Indeed, the new strategy of economic development put in place by the state relies on individual initiative, but the state still has considerable oversight over individuals leading to important economic and societal changes.

Many education entities are now handled and provided by somewhat regulated 'para-state' entities where "the public/private distinctions are in process of being worked out, the complexities of relationships and outcomes are multiplied"³⁴. In trying to understand how overseas teacher training came to be provided by a privatized local company that had little experience in the field of education per se, we can better appreciate the contradictory forces at work in Vietnam where 'para-state' sectors or quasi-autonomous entities from the state emerged as a by-product of marketization rather than a well-thought plan to restructure the state along a model of decentralized government³⁵. The conditions in Vietnamese society that facilitated these arrangements in the first place are the market-oriented activities that occur within the various structures of a still centrally planned system, as both state institutions and officials participate in business activities³⁶. As other scholars have shown, entrepreneurs in *Đổi Mới* Vietnam are part of a large professional network, and the state is often closely involved in order for them to conduct their business³⁷.

Our case study concerns a former state enterprise, which was first 'equitized' in 2005 (meaning here that a state-owned enterprise becomes partially privatized, but the state remains an important stakeholder of the equitized SOE, resulting in a diffused ownership). A few years later, the company was fully privatized and proceeded to intensify its involvement in various types of economic ventures, including teacher education as mentioned earlier on. The company has 1,000 employees, out of which 30 are working on education-related projects (the other employees have been working in real estate or labour supply, for instance). These 30 employees are managed by an educated director (Bachelor's degree in foreign languages) who used to be in charge of the labour export division in the same company.

³² Fforde, "Economics, History," p. 491. ; "Food purchases on the free market reportedly made up around 35% of urban workers' total expenditure on food in 1974-75", *ibid* p. 492.

³³ Fredrik Sjöholm, "State Owned Enterprises and Equitization in Vietnam," Working Paper 228, August 2006, p. 16, <http://swopec.hhs.se/eijswp/papers/eijswp0228.pdf>; retrieved on March 9, 2013.

³⁴ Martin Painter, "Governance Reforms in China and Vietnam: marketization, leapfrogging and Retro-Fitting", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, published online on 27 January 2014, p. 1. Martin Painter, "Reforming Social Services - Asian Experiences: From Command Economy to Hollow State? Decentralisation in Vietnam and China," *The Australian Journal of Administration*, vol. 67, n. 1, p. 79.

³⁵ See Painter, "Reforming Social Services," pp. 79-88.

³⁶ Sjöholm, "State Owned Enterprises," p. 2. M. Gainsborough, "Beneath the veneer of reform: the politics of economic liberalisation in Vietnam," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 35, 2002, p. 358.

³⁷ See for instance, Annette Miae Kim, *Learning to be Capitalists: Entrepreneurs in Vietnam's Transition Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Miae Kim's findings on real estate developers in Ho Chi Minh City show we are far here from the conventional image of the "rugged, lone entrepreneur whose own personality traits and taste for risk have led to his new activities," p. 46.

The company has been providing teacher training since late 2011. Staff of this company previously worked in various fields, among which was sending Vietnamese blue-collar labourers to work overseas. Thanks to business connections within political circles, especially the ministries of labour and education, the Enterprise Global-Vietnam director had prior knowledge about projected economic areas of development and the types of projects likely to be needed³⁸. These face-to-face interactions are not unusual, as personal relations are very important for business success in Vietnam, and the relative permanence of personnel in positions of economic power and authority reinforces the importance of networking³⁹. The partaking of the company in the field of education was first the result of the 2009 economic downturn, which put a damper on Enterprise Global-Vietnam's projects of sending labour overseas, and the company subsequently needed to diversify its economic activities.

Access to inside information also helps to explain the involvement of this company in teacher training. The director of Enterprise Global-Vietnam knew the state's budget in advance (some of the money could have been from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank as they are the major external sources of funding for education)⁴⁰, regarding both the amount of money to various activities, as well as the amount of money allocated by the central government or the provinces to various provinces. Thus his company could make preparations in advance and offer a programme responding to one of the needs underlined in the budget, namely human capital development in the form of teacher training⁴¹.

Moreover, the field of professional training in general is loosely regulated and flexible in Vietnam, as training can easily vary in terms of duration⁴². This made it easier to start a business in this specific field as opposed to others. In addition, Enterprise Global-Vietnam already had experience in sending Vietnamese labour abroad (dealing with visa issues, etc.), and such knowledge was, most of the time, but not always, to prove helpful in sending teachers for training abroad. More specifically, the company had exported labour to Malaysia. This might have given the director and managers some experience and contact leads as the Malaysian company with which they were working was looking to expand their educational services to international students, which might have made both parties keen on the opportunity⁴³.

Malaysia was also deemed an adequate choice since, among other reasons, many urban Malaysians speak English and the trainers for the various programmes are Malaysians who teach in the English language with the help of a Vietnamese translator⁴⁴. Furthermore, there is a strong belief in Vietnam that in order to better learn English, one needs to go abroad to a country where English is in widespread use.

Enterprise Global-Vietnam was able to propose short-term training programmes of approximately three months for Vietnamese vocational teachers who needed to improve their skills and raise their competency levels. Letters were sent to vocational training centres (Trung tâm giáo dục dạy nghề) in the various provinces inviting each centre to nominate two or three teachers to participate in this professional upgrading, for which the state would pay (unfortunately, information on the cost of training teachers was not made available). Regarding nominations, the centres, as a rule, often invited the experienced teachers, but not too senior in management⁴⁵. An

³⁸ Informant A, interview October 14, 2012.

³⁹ Fforde, "Economics, History", p. 496.

⁴⁰ Pham & Fry, "Vietnam as an Outlier," p. 231.

⁴¹ Such anti-competitive practices are not unusual in Đổi mới period. See Gainsborough, "Beneath the veneer of reform", p. 358.

⁴² Socialist Republic of Vietnam, National Education for All (EFA), p. 23.

⁴³ Informant B, interview December 17, 2012.

⁴⁴ Informant B, interview December 17, 2012. For instance in 2002, the then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad reintroduced English as the medium of instruction in the public education system and by early 2003, state schools were using English to teach mathematics and hard sciences. Azizha Kassim, "PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES: Development and Internationalization," Tham Siew Yean, ed., *Internationalizing Higher Education in Malaysia: Understanding, Practices and Challenges*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2013, p. 48.

⁴⁵ Informant B, interview December 17, 2012.

educational group called SEGi –SEG International Berhad (International Limited) in the neighbouring country of Malaysia, which specialized in offering vocational programmes and higher academic level training, was chosen. The Malaysian training option was perceived as offering better standards than the one offered in Vietnam, and Malaysia was a cheaper option than other possibilities in the Southeast Asian region, such as Singapore⁴⁶. More precisely, Vietnamese officials chose Malaysia as a destination to improve the quality of vocational teachers due to Malaysia's completion of its vocational standard package in accordance with European standards in the late 1990s. These officials believed that it would take ten years for Vietnam to reach the quality of vocational training attained in Malaysia. Japan and Germany were not an option, as they have 'elusive standards' that Vietnam would be unable to achieve⁴⁷.

The priority of Enterprise Global-Vietnam is clearly economic efficiency, as the profit margin has to be attractive, leading this company to opt for low-cost strategies, minimized risks, and short-term training. These three options are not an unusual strategy for Vietnamese private businesses under the *Đổi Mới*⁴⁸. In addition to the cost of the training for teachers, the company has to pay for various functions, business trips and various forms of incentives for partners to support the programme. Still, it is likely that the company could often make a net profit of 50 percent⁴⁹. Hence, Malaysia is considered as the preferred option, instead of Germany where there is a strong focus on vocational and technical training, but is an expensive destination. Still, some could experience German *savoir-faire* through the German Malaysian Institute (GMI) created in 1992 through which, thanks to technical cooperation, Germany transfers technical knowledge and skills⁵⁰. For instance, Enterprise Global-Vietnam sent 142 Vietnamese vocational teachers in spring 2013 for one month of English proficiency at SEGi University and three months skills training at GMI⁵¹.

Moreover, the 1995 entry of Vietnam into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) makes it easier for the company to develop joint projects with private educational institutes spread throughout Malaysia. Vietnam had aimed to integrate the world economy by also joining the ASEAN Free Trade Area in 1996 and, in 1995, it applied for membership to the World Trade Organization (of which it became a member in 2007). Honouring the directives of the World Trade Organization, the Education Law issued in 2005 in Vietnam no longer forbids the commercialization of educational activities⁵². Not only the commercialization of education, but also its regional and international orientation, were formalized in March 2013 through Political Decision 371, which approved a scheme to improve the training of vocational trainers and managers. Such training would occur either in an ASEAN country or at an international level for the years 2012 to 2015⁵³.

In regards to our case study, Enterprise Global-Vietnam sent teachers for training at SEGi Education Group in Malaysia. Such a place was chosen as, in August 2011, SEGi Education Group signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) regarding collaboration for technical and vocational training with the Vietnamese Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs

⁴⁶ Informant A, interview October 14, 2012.

⁴⁷ "Vietnam Sends one thousand vocational teachers for standardisation in Malaysia," 31 January 2012, <http://www.phaplutvn.vn/doi-song/viec-lam/201201/Khoi-dong-chien-dich-dua-1-van-giao-vien-day-nghe-di-chuan-hoa-tai-Malaysia-2063082/>; retrieved on 6 June 2013. Professionally translated by a tiers person from Vietnamese to English language.

⁴⁸ Henaff and Martin, "Stratégies des institutions et des entreprises," *Travail, emploi*, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁹ Informant B, interview December 17, 2012.

⁵⁰ "SkillsMalaysia INVITE Graduation", (<http://www.segi.edu.my/happening/skillsmalaysia-invite-graduation>), retrieved on 17 June 2013. SEGi opened its doors at first in 1977 in Kuala Lumpur as a Systematic College in offering professional qualifications before expanding to respond to local and international educational needs. This evolution has been part of Malaysia's desire to become a developed nation by 2020 and relying on Twelve Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) as a means to boost the economy, among which, the educational sector.

⁵¹ "SkillsMalaysia INVITE Graduation."

⁵² Pham, "Doi Moi (Renovation)," p. 218.

⁵³ "Case of teachers accusing that they were sent overseas for training under disguise. What do involved parties say?" 26 April 2013, (<http://phaplutxahoi.vn/20130426083045267p1002c1019/cac-ben-lien-quan-noi-gi.htm>), retrieved on 6 June 2013 and translated professionally by a tiers person in English language.

(MOLISA) through the General Department of Vocational Training of the Government of Vietnam and SEGi University College. The aim was to train "10,000 standardized teachers for Vietnam within 5 years (2011-2015)", a far-reaching objective that required the help of Enterprise Global-Vietnam in channelling and organizing the stay of the participants⁵⁴. This collaboration started in September 2011. However, officials at the MOLISA are targeting a large number, but frequently, in practice, the actual number is lower. This fact might explain why so far only Enterprise Global-Vietnam has been helping in sending teachers abroad. By November 2012, SEGi University posted online

Since SEG International Berhad (SEGi) was appointed by the Malaysian government as Project Leader for a new initiative called SkillsMalaysia International Technical Education and Vocational Training Programme (SkillsMalaysia INVITE), SEGi has seen hundreds of Vietnamese vocational teachers/trainers complete the programme successfully⁵⁵.

At the same time, SEGi University announced that it was also examining with the government of Vietnam possibilities of implementing programmes regarding English language training for teachers and the development of early childhood education⁵⁶. As the scholars Pham Lan Huong and Gerald Fry note, teachers in general are expected to master English⁵⁷.

Challenges of Subcontracting Training Abroad

The choice of a regional rather than a local training context was not without problems. For instance, in January 2012, a teacher training pilot project undertaken by a three-party partnership between Vietnam's Administration of Vocational Training, the private Malaysian educational group running SEGi-SEG International Berhad colleges throughout the country, and our Vietnamese public-turned-private company sent some 96 vocational teachers from Vietnam to Malaysia for a four-month training programme at the Centre for Instructor and Advanced Skill Training (CIAST), which is an institute sponsored by the government of Japan for promoting Asian human resource development. The Hanoi newspaper *Phat Luat*, which has a tendency to follow the party line, subsequently reported that trainees had been pleased with their experience. Ms. Nguyen Thi Tham, for instance, a teacher from a vocational school in Danang, noted that: "lecturers are friendly, enthusiastic and have methods that attract the participants". In the wake of this pilot project, the Administration of Vocational Training stated that they would conduct an assessment review to prepare to send around 1,000 vocational teachers to Malaysia for training purposes in 2012⁵⁸.

However, among this first batch, not everyone had a very positive experience. The company received complaints from the pilot project participants regarding the quality of training, food, and accommodation. They had expectations about their stay and training in Malaysia, thinking that it would be of much better quality in all the aspects of teaching, facilities and food, compared to what they had access to back home. The training was conducted in a vocational training centre catering mostly to the needs of dropout students, and the participants were provided with accommodation in the dormitory of the centre. Due to the profile of the centre's student population, the level of instruction was low and the Vietnamese teachers complained that they

⁵⁴ "Vietnam Sends one thousand vocational teachers for standardisation in Malaysia."

⁵⁵ "Vietnamese trainees receive Skills Mal INVITE certificates," 26 November 2012, (<http://www.segi.edu.my/happening/vietnamese-trainees-receive-skillsmal-invite-certificates>), retrieved on 17 June, 2013.

⁵⁶ "Government of Vietnam signs MOU with SEGi," (<http://www.segi.edu.my/happening/government-of-vietnam-signs-mou-with-segi>), retrieved on 17 June 2013.

⁵⁷ Pham & Fry, "Vietnam as an Outlier," p. 236.

⁵⁸ "Vietnam Sends one thousand vocational teachers for standardisation in Malaysia."

learnt very little. In Vietnam, instructors are well trained in theory, but lack a hands-on approach, a gap which the instruction in Malaysia was supposed to fit⁵⁹.

In addition, teachers in Vietnam benefit from a high status as there is a long-standing Confucian heritage stressing respect for education⁶⁰. Confucius taught students to respect and obey teachers because teachers are not only instructors but also models for correct behaviour⁶¹. While they were in Malaysia, the trainers felt deeply offended by the so-called 'spring check', when residential assistants entered their rooms without the teachers' permission and wrote negative reports after finding pork and alcohol in their rooms. At best, the Vietnamese teachers underwent a cultural experience through their stay in Malaysia, but the professional purpose of the programme was barely realized⁶².

However, in spite of this negative feedback, no changes were instituted as is apparent from the complaints of the group of teachers who went for the training in spring 2013. They had similar complaints about the quality of the programme and accommodation. The Director of Enterprise Global-Vietnam responded to such a critique that: "many Vietnamese had misleading thoughts that overseas learning conditions should be as good as a five star hotel."⁶³ For most teachers, the reason for receiving such training was the hope that it would translate into a higher wage⁶⁴. Such thinking on the part of the teachers makes sense, since in-service 45 days of training activities are compulsory for all teachers as the government encourages teachers to upgrade their skills. When they do so, they usually receive a salary increase⁶⁵.

One Vietnamese informant underlined that it is not easy to find overseas academic or business partners, as a high degree of patience is required in order to engage in business activities with Vietnamese counterparts. Indeed, it is almost impossible for the director of any company that works with state officials to confirm a schedule in advance, as the head of the company needs to continuously countercheck every single decision with state officials. Thus, many foreign counterparts complain that they cannot prepare any project in advance. The educational company in Malaysia, however, was willing to accept and work according to these stipulations imposed by the work culture in Vietnam⁶⁶.

Another issue that emerged from sub-contracting expertise overseas was the problem of visa procedures. Criticism emerged in local online newspapers when a participant complained that he was part of a batch of 142 participants who underwent a four-month training period (vocational training) from 27 December 2012 to 27 May 2013 for which they were sent on a holiday visa to Malaysia, and so had to return to Vietnam in the middle of the training to renew their visas. In order to avoid problems with immigration procedures, they had to falsely declare 'holiday' as the purpose of the trip. As a result, while in Malaysia "no one dared to go out for fear of police arrest". Mr. Luu Van Hai, Dean of the Electronic-Telecommunications Department, Vinh Phuc Industrial College, who was one of the participants, said, "We as students dare not claim to be students... We even feel ashamed and regret the way our countrymen's money was spent [on this programme]."⁶⁷ In response to the complaints of the lack of professionalism in this aspect, the director of Enterprise Global-Vietnam replied that due to time constraints they were not able to get the student visas on

⁵⁹ Nolwen Henaff, "introduction," Nolwen Henaff and Tran Thi Kim Thuan, eds., *Recherche sur la qualité de l'éducation dans la province de Khánh Hòa, Viêt-nam*, Phnom Penh, Cambodia: Aide et Action Asie du Sud-Est, 2008, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth St George, "Socialist ideology and practical realism: the process of compromise in Vietnam's law on education," John Stanley Gillespie, Pip Nicholson, Penelope Nicholson, eds., *Asian Socialism And Legal Change: The Dynamics Of Vietnamese And Chinese Reform*, Canberra: ANU, 2005, p. 116.

⁶¹ Pham, "Doi Moi (Renovation)," p. 213.

⁶² Informant A, interview October 14, 2012.

⁶³ "Case of teachers accusing that they were sent overseas for training under disguise. What do involved parties say?"

⁶⁴ Informant B, interview December 17, 2012.

⁶⁵ Dr. Phan Van Que, "Teacher Development and Education in Vietnam," 2009, p. 29 http://fkip.ut.ac.id/ting/wp-content/uploads/download-manager-files/Prosiding_TING%20I_Baru.pdf; retrieved on 16 March 2014.

⁶⁶ Informant A, interview October 14, 2012.

⁶⁷ "Hiccups during the pilot test!", 17 April 2013 (<http://www.baomoi.com/Vua-thi-diem-da-truc-trac/59/10825671.epi>), retrieved on 6 June, 2013. Professionally translated by a tiers person in English language.

time. He also acknowledged that: "the conditions at SUN RISE Malaysia Institute were not as good as in other institutes". Indeed, a lot of time was lost on commuting to the training site as "the distance between the lodging and the campus was as far as 42 kilometres". In the face of such criticism, the involved parties – the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), provincial Departments of Labour, War Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) and Enterprise Global-Vietnam – responded by blaming one another, rather than taking responsibility for the quality of the programme⁶⁸.

In this case, financial gain at all cost may have been the problem, not only on the side of Enterprise Global-Vietnam, but also on the provider's side, as the Malaysian educational group does not seem to have given enough due consideration to the quality of the programme. The cultural issue was neither addressed by both sides and no preliminary cross-cultural training was provided to Vietnamese teachers to better understand Malaysia's Muslim society and to develop a degree of cultural sensitivity before embarking on the trip, as a recurring complaint was the difficulty to obtain access to pork and alcohol. The perceived lack of respect of Malaysians toward Vietnamese teachers (unannounced 'spring check' of their rooms) likely had a mostly negative impact on the latter's perception of the quality of the programme. Research on cross-cultural learning suggests that "the more the model or trainer seems similar to the trainees, the more the trainees relate to the trainer and the more attention they pay" to the learning process⁶⁹.

More generally, reflecting on the recent development of education offered to foreign students in Malaysia, scholar Abdul Rahman Embong warns that quality should not be sacrificed for the sake of quantity and economic profits. Quality here refers to not just the courses offered, but also the quality of the universities' services in terms of "accommodation, counselling, socialization and general welfare"⁷⁰.

The Challenges of Alternative Learning Designs (Montessori)

A female instructor who has been working in public kindergartens for thirty years, the last six of which were in a private kindergarten in Hanoi, noted that a 2003 state reform has had an important impact on her teaching methods: it gives her and other teachers more freedom to organize the learning process and to experiment with ideas. For instance, before 2003, when she was teaching children about nature, the curriculum was so narrow that it even specified which trees she should talk about during the lesson. Post-2003, she now has the freedom to present material on the local ecosystem according to her own preference, and in a way that will help to foster environmental awareness among the students⁷¹. Indeed, since 2003, the Vietnamese government has prioritized the curriculum under the programme Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). In parallel, the government now stresses the key role of teachers in fostering children's learning ability and educational development⁷². For instance, teachers are increasingly expected to speak the language of internationalization, English.

Again, due to prior knowledge of the Ministry of Education and Training's focus, the director of Enterprise Global-Vietnam was able to offer an English language teacher training programme for kindergarten teachers through the same Malaysian educational group. In late 2011, two batches of about forty kindergarten teachers each, and in 2012, an additional few batches, were selected from various provinces where the local governments paid for their respective training. They were sent to Malaysia for one to six months, depending on the budget allotment, either

⁶⁸ "Case of teachers accusing that they were sent overseas for training under disguise. What do involved parties say?"

⁶⁹ J. Stewart Black and Mark Mendenhall, "Cross-Cultural Training Effectiveness: A Review and a Theoretical Framework for Future Research", *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 15, n. 1, January 1990, p. 126.

⁷⁰ Abdul Rahman Embong, "Micro Perspectives: Ideas, Practices and Challenges," *Internationalizing Higher Education in Malaysia*, p. 122.

⁷¹ Interview of official at the Ministry of Education and Training, June 2013, Hanoi.

⁷² Dang and Boyd, "Renovating early childhood education pedagogy", pp. 1-2.

directly to the company, or to the General Department of Education⁷³. While these teachers are generally positive about their overall experience on promotional video clips produced by Enterprise Global-Vietnam, there were still a few complaints regarding Muslim food taboos and inadequate allowances.

One informant mentioned that the employees at Enterprise Global-Vietnam were so busy planning, organizing, confirming the contract terms, and dealing with the logistical problems that they had no time to do a thorough check of the programme's contents. As the informant stated: "This is a business, no time for the content". This informant visited the language facilities in Malaysia and was not impressed by the quality of the software programme for teaching English and the fact that the teaching seemed to lack a significant component of verbal interaction. Instead, emphasis was placed on the writing component⁷⁴. The latter is an important factor, considering that the primary objective of the training is to help these kindergarten teachers enhance their English language skills, especially their verbal skills. In spite of this, such certificates for training in foreign languages, specifically in English, are perceived as valuable complementary assets for professionals in order to secure better jobs under the *Đổi Mới* and the global market⁷⁵.

Another potential training programme which has the high probability of being taken up by Enterprise Global-Vietnam in the long run is the Montessori Method. This is an internationally popular child-centred pedagogical method that emphasizes self-directed learning and the use of developmental toys. An informant from the Ministry of Education and Training notes that some aspects of this approach are already being used among a number of private school teachers. Some might have heard of it during their training as teachers at the university level, most likely at one of the ten teacher-training universities⁷⁶. Another channel for learning about the Montessori Method is through the two international Montessori schools, one in Ho Chi Minh City, and the other in Hanoi. Both were established by expatriates – in Ho Chi Minh City the founders are members of the America Montessori Society, while the one in Hanoi (Sakura Montessori) was created by Japanese expatriates – and subscribe to the established Montessori pedagogy and curriculum. They were established a few years ago and most likely represent the means by which Montessori was introduced in Vietnam. The teaching staff are fluent in English, recruited from around the globe, and trained in the Montessori Method specifically⁷⁷.

Currently, in local Vietnamese kindergartens, eighty percent of the time teachers follow the official curriculum (according to official rules) in the class, while the rest of the time can be used for other pedagogical approaches, such as aspects of Montessori⁷⁸. Upon learning that one official at the Ministry of Education and Training was interested in the Montessori Method, the education manager at Enterprise Global-Vietnam considered offering training programmes in this approach. However, nothing has been formalized thus far.

The Vietnamese educational system has been criticized for overemphasis on rote learning, and part of the National Education for All Action Plan 2003-2015 has been to evolve from quantity to quality of education, which has also been enshrined in Article 5.2 of the 2005 education law: "Methods of education must bring into full play the activeness, the consciousness, the self-motivation, and the creative thinking of learners; foster the self-study ability, the practical ability, the learning eagerness and the will to advance forward"(National Assembly of the Socialist

⁷³ Informant B, interview December 17, 2012.

⁷⁴ Informant A, interview October 14, 2012.

⁷⁵ Henaff and Martin, "Stratégies individuelles et familiales," in *Travail, emploi*, p. 76.

⁷⁶ "Teachers are trained in over 100 institutions including 10 teacher-training universities, 12 pedagogical departments at different universities, two educational management colleges, and 45 junior teaching training colleges offering short-term cycle training programs lasting three years for lower secondary teachers. Secondary teachers are trained at the university level (four-to-five years programme). Dr. Phan Van Que, "Teacher, Development and Education in Vietnam," pp. 28-29.

⁷⁷ (<http://www.sakuramontessori.jp/home/english/sakura-montessori/why-sakura-montessori.html>) and (<http://montessori.edu.vn/>), both retrieved on 30 May 2014.

⁷⁸ Interview of official at the Ministry of Education and Training, June 2013, Hanoi.

Republic of Vietnam, 2005:3)⁷⁹. Such rhetoric is linked to the Education for All objective to produce “active and self-directed learners” during early childhood education (ECE)⁸⁰.

Early education in Vietnam is offered on both a public and private basis. It caters to children from three months to six years-old and is not compulsory. The challenge here is that the Ministry of Education and Training oversees the education sector, and currently all kindergartens (including the private ones) have to follow, eighty percent of the time, a curriculum designed by the state which is not based on the Montessori Method's emphasis on individual and self-learning.

Still, commonalities between the Socialist ideology and the Montessori philosophy do exist, which could facilitate the implementation of such a method. For instance, Cossentino's study shows the importance of work within the Montessori philosophy, which is “cast as the means and end of Montessori education”. Montessori elaborated a theory of ‘good work’ linking human progress to social development⁸¹. As Maria Montessori stated: “a child's desire to work represents a vital instinct since he cannot organize his personality without working”, as she believed that a healthy development is both reached and manifested in the child's deep concentration on work freely chosen⁸². Thanks to the experience of joyful and self-chosen work, the child would develop the ‘virtues’ of work, sociability, independence and concentration⁸³. For Maria Montessori, work belongs to children. Not only is work the focal point of the classroom, but is also ‘revered’ as students choose their own work and finish it at their own pace with minimum adult intervention. Indeed, ‘work is not only of personal growth but also of harmonious social relations, concordance with nature, and, finally, a “good” life’⁸⁴.

Such a perception of work as beneficial for humanity as part of Montessori's philosophy of learning could resonate with the Socialist educational ideology of Vietnam. Indeed, Vietnamese children have been taught to appreciate labour. Whereas in the 1980s such a concept had a class-based element by promoting the labour of peasants and workers, since the 1990s the student programme has focused more on a broad appreciation of labour. Moreover, the meaning of growing up is manifested through the concepts of courage and industriousness; such ideas are stressed in storybooks that children regularly encounter in school⁸⁵.

However, at this point, any integration of Montessori's methods into the curriculum is still only a possibility. If this option were to be implemented, it would be a revolutionary innovation of what is basically an old-fashioned Socialist/neo-Confucian education pedagogy and curriculum. Indeed, Vietnam today maintains a teacher-centred approach where the teacher imposes knowledge and authority over students. In contrast, the Montessori pedagogy is a student-centred approach which is more collaborative in nature, through which the teacher facilitates the learning process of an actively engaged student. Montessori teachers are trained to reject spoon-feeding, but rather to cultivate children's thinking process with questions that make students find the answers themselves.

Recent trends do not bode well for the widespread acceptance of this student-centred approach. According to the scholar David Marr, as the ideological control of the Vietnamese population has loosened with changes initiated since the Đổi Mới, many northern Vietnamese communes have sought to revitalize moral Confucian/pre-Confucian ideas. Likewise, through her fieldwork in a northern Vietnamese rural commune, Rydstrom notes that the educational system there stresses Confucian beliefs such as the principle of “First Morality then Knowledge”, which in

⁷⁹ Paul Horton, *Bullied into it: Bullying, Power and the Conduct of Conduct*, Gloucestershire: E&E Publishing, 2012, p. 40.

⁸⁰ Newberry, “Durable Assemblage”, p. 4.

⁸¹ Jacqueline M. Cossentino, “Goodness, Vocation, and Engagement in the Montessori Method,” *Curriculum Inquiry*, vol. 36, n. 1, Spring 2006, p. 64.

⁸² Cossentino, “Goodness, Vocation,” pp. 65-66.

⁸³ Jacqueline M. Cossentino, “Ritualizing Expertise: A Non-Montessorian View of the Montessori Method,” *American Journal of Education*, vol. 111, n. 2, February 2005, p. 212.

⁸⁴ Cossentino, “Goodness, Vocation,” p. 83.

⁸⁵ Vasavakul, “Managing the Young,” pp. 233, 235-37, 243.

practice translates to the demand for children to comply with teachers' requests⁸⁶, as opposed to the Montessori method which aims at nurturing the independence of the child and respect toward the child. Hence, the content of the Montessori approach, which promotes freedom, imagination and responsibility, could be seen as subversive in a system that believes in 'peaceful evolution', that is, a Western-sponsored secret plan to weaken Vietnamese Socialism through propagating Western ideals such as political liberalization.

It may also be hard to convince some educational officials of the benefits of the Montessori Method, given that kindergarten education in Vietnam already has a somewhat good reputation, and does put emphasis on the pedagogical development of the child. However, there is room for improvement. The informant from the Ministry of Education and Training notes that some teachers at the kindergarten level might not grasp the pedagogical aspect of learning in the existing state curriculum, i.e. that pre-schoolers learn through play, as all teachers, he added, need to understand that play is not just unproductive fun, but involves actual skills to cope with challenge, frustration, reward and failure. Moreover, teachers often fail to address the students' individual needs; rather they focus on planning the days' activities for the group as a whole⁸⁷.

Taking stock of this current educational environment, the manager of education at Enterprise Global-Vietnam realized that going forward with these plans would require a thorough study of the Montessori Method, and that there would need to be a policy advocate for the company to convince the relevant authorities. It would require reformulating the official syllabus, a more expensive approach to education due to Montessori's low ratio of students per teacher, as the focus is on the child, not on the group. The manager's busy schedule has thus far precluded Enterprise Global-Vietnam in pursuing this plan, but it remains a consideration⁸⁸.

On a regional level in Southeast Asia, 'learning through play' has become a catchphrase in pre-school education over the preceding decade, and the phrase represents part of the global development initiative of UNESCO and other organizations. In June 2013, the SEGi website announced the possibilities of developing programmes with Vietnam regarding early child education⁸⁹. Indeed, SEGi had been earlier referred to as 'the champion of Early Childhood and Childcare Education' (ECCE) by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia, in their mission to advance the qualification of ECCE practitioners⁹⁰. This circulation of ideas regarding childhood development could have prompted the Vietnamese government and the Enterprise Global-Vietnam to broach the Montessori option⁹¹. Whether the potential benefits will outweigh the associated costs and ideological barriers remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Unlike the early phase of the *Đổi Mới*, Vietnam's growth in recent years has been largely driven by capital accumulation rather than productivity⁹². To maintain strong economic growth, the country needs to increase the productivity of its labour force, especially as its youth population is diminishing, by improving human capital. Part of the human capital project is therefore to develop pre-school education in order to nurture cognitive and behavioural skills to their optimum, and to push the development of vocational training that the knowledge based economy is requiring for higher technical skills.

⁸⁶ Helle Rydstrøm, "'like a White Piece of Paper.' Embodiment and the Moral Upbringing of Vietnamese Children," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 66, n. 3, 2001, pp. 398-99.

⁸⁷ Interview of official at the Ministry of Education and Training, Hanoi, June 2013.

⁸⁸ Informant A, interview October 14, 2012.

⁸⁹ "Government of Vietnam signs MOU with SEGi."

⁹⁰ "Passion guided, industry driven university," <http://www.segi.edu.my/about/message-from-ceo>; retrieved on 17 June 2013.

⁹¹ "For Montessori, the natural order of the universe is exemplified in the cardinal virtues of concentration, coordination, order, independence, and respect. Learning to practice these virtues is the focus of what Montessori called the first plane of development (birth to age 6)." Cossentino, "Ritualizing Expertise," p. 216.

⁹² "Skilling Up Vietnam," p. 31.

This paper has examined the growth patterns and trends in these sectors. It has also examined one case study of an educational broker based in Hanoi engaged in contracting teacher training to a service provider in a neighbouring country. While the broker enterprise was advantaged by having prior information on the Vietnamese state's budgets and plans, it still lacked the professional expertise required to ensure the professional quality of the training, as teachers revealed through their various complaints. Indeed, given the circumstances, this teacher training seems to be simply an outgrowth of the brokering firm's previous experience in the labour export business, a heritage that reflects its past as a previously state-owned firm.

The implications of this case study suggest that the key cause for the creation of this professional training for teachers can be traced to the environment of a country still in transition from a Socialist economy to being more market-driven, where the ability to use contacts (a behavioural characteristic inherited from its Communist past) outweighs other pedagogical capacities in importance. This case illustrates Painter's analysis of the transition to a state-managed market economy in China and Vietnam where, as a result of state-led policies, new areas of private activity created state service delivery functions that correspond to being "pushed into the market."⁹³

In our case study, this entrepreneurial turn has some negative repercussions on the training of kindergarten and vocational teachers⁹⁴. From the teachers' perspective, there is a legitimacy issue, as this entrepreneurialized educational training lacks overall accountability regarding the quality of its product. In 2003, the MOET created the Department for Testing and Education Quality Accreditation to develop quality standards to assess schools and universities. However, educational evaluation in Vietnam remains at a very premature stage of development⁹⁵. Hence, the study tells us that the adverse consequence of such services has been quality deficit in the training of teachers and how such training fits within the first period of the *Đổi Mới* when capital accumulation and job creation were the main goal, rather than quality assurance of human capital development.

⁹³ See Painter, "Reforming Social Services," p. 85.

⁹⁴ Saul Estrin et al., "Entrepreneurship in Transition Economies," p. 5, http://klausmeyer.co.uk/publications/2006_estrin_meyer_bychkova_HANDBK.pdf; retrieved on 20 June 2013.

⁹⁵ Pham & Fry, "Vietnam as an Outlier," p. 236.