

Report on the decentralization-oriented Educational Management System in Vietnam

Dr. Tran Thi Kim Thuan

Education Researcher

National Institute for Educational Sciences

Vietnam

The development of multi-sectoral economy in Vietnam is currently creating the new resources for its economic development. In this regard, the education needs to be diversified in response to the demands of various classes and economic strata in its society. The educational subsidized policy of Vietnam proved to be inappropriate with the current social life during the past decades. The educational administrators issue the policies on diversifying the types of training in order to satisfy the demands of both Government and whole society; learners have to pay tuition fees and the policies of deploying graduates from universities, colleges, vocational and professional secondary schools are abolished; it is allowed to gradually expand the non-public schools such as semi-public schools, private and people-founded schools or schools set up in joint venture with international organizations and 100% foreign owned ones. This is a remarkable transition in the educational management in Vietnam. The establishment and rapid development of the various types of non-public schools and educational institutions from pre-school to tertiary education have shaped a completely new face of the educational system of Vietnam. It can be said that Vietnam is now in the process of forming and building a new State management model in the education sector under the market mechanism with the State management.

At present, Vietnam is giving the top priority to education in the national policy and therefore the educational development strategic plan for 2001-2010 (EDSP 2001-2010) is drawn up and 7 groups of solutions are addressed to effectuate this strategy such as: 1) renovation of objectives, contents and educational program; 2) development of the teaching staff; 3) educational management reform; 4) continuous streamline on the structure of the national education system and development of school network and educational institutions; 5) enhancement of financial sources and facilities for the education sector; 6) acceleration of the educational socialization; 7) Promotion of international cooperation in education.

Out of 7 solution groups to implement EDSP 2001-2010, the renovation of education management is considered as the breakthrough stage. The contents of the renovation in education management include: upgrading the thought, methodology/modality and mechanism in education management in the direction of improving the efficiency of State management and promoting the decentralization in order to enhance the activeness and self-responsibility of the localities & educational institutions and to solve the urgent problems in the effective manner, to prevent and drive back negative phenomenon, thus to create the sound ground for the active movement of the whole educational system.

The decentralization in education of Vietnam is understood to be the strongly decentralized administration.

The policy on educational decentralization with the orientation of “Authorizing the centrally provincial/municipal people’s committee to manage the pre-school education, general secondary education, vocational and professional secondary education and even some colleges” was issued 6 years ago. The institutionalization of this policy has been carried out with the certain efforts but it remains slow. Therefore this policy has recently been underlined with the orientation of “accelerating the decentralization in education, promoting the activeness and self-responsibilities of the educational institutions, especially universities and responsibilities of provincial/municipal/district/commune people’s committees for effectuating the State management in education”.

During the year 2002-2003, MOET of Vietnam has been implementing a project with an aim of carrying out the researches, actual surveys, and workshops on the educational decentralization in Vietnam in the cooperation with EU.

In March 2002, this project organized a workshop 1 with the objectives of presenting an overview on the educational decentralization in the different countries in order to withdraw the lessons for the educational decentralization in Vietnam. The workshop 2 was organized in October 2002 to unify the approaches to the educational management methodology.

In order to make a research of decentralization, the project has classified the management functions of the education sector in Vietnam into 5 main functions (macro management, professional, administrative, inspection, information). The workshop 2 discussed and clarified the following issues: the objectives of the educational decentralization, the current situation of decentralization in aspects of responsibilities, rights and self-responsibility of the educational administration levels; some existing shortcomings and recommendations on decentralization in the process of performing the management function in the education sector.

The project carried out the surveys in 12 provinces/cities to: 1) collect information on the actual situation of the management function performance in localities; 2) collect the specific recommendations on improvement, **consolidation** and renovation of the educational management in the direction of strong decentralization in localities.

My report is based on the review of these surveys.

Situation of the education decentralization in Vietnam

1) The implementation of macro management function:

In general, majority of ideas agree that MOET of Vietnam has executed the macro management function by laws, policies, guidelines and inspection. One of the key causes is the smooth cooperation between MOET and localities in elaborating the educational policies.

However, it is reflected by many people that MOET still involves in specific work of the management function too much and the division of responsibilities between MOET and localities in term of formulating the educational policies is not made yet. Thus, majority of ideas recommend that MOET needs to issue the legal documents on clarifying responsibilities and rights between MOET and provincial/city people’s committee in the aspect of drawing up the educational policies.

In view of the educational development planning, provinces/cities follow the process: on basis of assessing the implementation of educational development plans in previous year and objectives, tasks for the new planned year, each school prepares its own plan, BOET & DOET is in charge of reviewing, adjusting and finalizing it and then in cooperation with some relevant sectors to review, correct and submit it to provincial/city people's committees for approval. In other words, the current educational development planning process is effectuated on the bottom-up basis (schools - BOETs - DOET).

In fact, the educational development planning in localities remains formalistic. The main cause is that in some places the planning of schools and BOETs is slow and data of schools, BOETs and one of DOET are sometimes incompatible. DOET should be active in educational development planning for the whole province/city so as to be timely approved for a new school year. In many cases, the approved plans do not meet the actual needs.

In the planning stage, the education sector usually encounters difficulties such as: shortage of concrete guidelines on planning developed by MOET for DOETs and BOETs so that the development plan links to the conditions of plan implementation, especially the coordination mechanism between the educational institutions and concerned bodies of districts or provinces/cities, etc. Therefore, MOET needs to provide the sufficient guidelines on formulating and effectuating plans, in which it is specifically stipulated the coordination mechanism between the relevant bodies: the education sector needs to play the key role in this stage, and other sectors should be coordinators. Although responsibilities for implementing the educational plan are assessed to link to the rights on personnel as well as on finance, in fact, this matter is different among some provinces.

In regard of the overall assessment on the implementation of district-based decentralization policy, it is mostly stated that: the transfer of comprehensive management from the education sector to district people's committee currently needs to be concretized by authorizing the management right in terms of organization, personnel and finance for the local educational management institutions, at the same time increasing more active management rights to the undertaking level - schools (but it needs to depend on the capacity of each school to implement for the time ahead).

2. The implementation of professional function:

In term of contents and educational curriculum, some ideas reckon that the compilation of current educational curriculum has reflected the participatory responsibilities of the local educational officers.

In term of textbooks, the policies to ensure the sense of responsibility of local educational staff involved in textbook compilation are unavailable. For example, it comes to agreement that the establishment of the textbook design board needs the wider participation of local specialists in the compilation process in order to improve the adaptability and appropriateness of the textbooks.

In term of teaching equipment, the clear regulations on the responsibilities of each educational management levels (MOET, DOET and BOET) for the preparation of equipment list, sample appraisal, procurement, provision, utilization and management of teaching equipment have been formulated. However, many provinces request that the

schools need to be authorized the self- procurement of materials and teaching equipment by utilizing the tuition fees (calculated on the percentage regulated by MOET).

In term of the educational quality assessment, the clear regulations on responsibilities for the educational quality assessment between the management levels (MOET, DOET and BOET) have been set up and the division of responsibilities between the management levels for preparing exam tests, invigilating, marking the exams and approving the exam results is rational. The provinces come to consensus that: the educational quality management should be assigned to one administration level (only DOET), the decentralized exam organization and diploma grant/award for upper secondary bloc and lower secondary bloc need to be assigned to DOET and BOETs organize to check, evaluate and grant the certificates to secondary education because BOETs do not currently have the sufficient number of staff to implement the professional assessment, therefore DOET needs to establish an take examinations division; if the multiple-choice exams are adopted, MOET has to prepare the exam test because the capacity of local educational officers is poor.

In term of pre-service training, though there are the regulations that province/city is responsible for training teachers at the lower secondary level or lower (in local TTCs), the specific regulations on teacher training responsibilities of MOET and people's committees at the different levels are unavailable. This may be one of causes resulting in the non-integrated teacher training by region and by teacher structure.

In term of teacher in-service training, the responsibilities and rights of people's committee at different levels, DOET and BOETs regarding the teacher in-service training are clearly identified. However, budget request for the teacher in-service training faces many difficulties, the teacher in-service training and standardization remain ineffective, especially teachers with too poor qualifications. As a result, MOET needs to issue the specific and consistent guidelines in the purpose of sorting out the dilemma in which the poorly qualified and un-standadized teachers are still on-service.

In term of solutions for pre-service and teacher in-service training, majority of provinces unanimously reach the conclusion that teacher training (teachers at lower secondary level or lower) and teacher in-service training within the province/city need to be assigned to DOET so that the quality of education in localities is improved and the above-mentioned difficulties are overcome.

3. The implementation of administrative function:

3.1. Personnel administration and organization:

In general, in 12 provinces/cities, DOET manages the upper secondary schools and schools directly under DOET, district people's committees manage the lower secondary, primary and pre-school education.

The overall assessment on the personnel rights in provinces shows the difference in aspect of personnel administration authority among 12 provinces: some provinces self-assess that they have rights on personnel adoption when the education plan is effectuated, but some provinces have the opposite assessment, the others do not have the clear assessment.

Annually, on the basis of plans of BOETs and schools directly under BOETs, DOET actively prepares the personnel planning for all educational levels, then provincial/city people's committee approves it; additionally, in some places due to the slack cooperation between levels in preparing the personnel planning, it causes the

difficulties for the education sector in developing and implementing the educational development plan.

Moreover, the personnel administration practice within the districts is different; in some places responsibilities do not match the administration rights, this results in the non-integrated personnel and institutional administration or in some other places BOETs directly manage teachers but they do not have the rights to give punishments to teachers who violate the regulations because it is the administration level that nominates/promotes teachers to make the decision of punishment.

In term of organizational structure and functions, tasks of DOET and BOETs, it remains inadequate, specifically: the regulations on tasks, functions of DOET & BOETs but no regulations on organizational structure of DOET and BOETs are available; rights of Director of DOET and Head of BOETs do not match their responsibilities and professional tasks.

On the other hand, permanent positions for BOETs do not currently meet the actual needs owing to the shortage of staff, the contracted staff adoption mechanism. This is resulted from the exclusion of characteristics of the educational administration.

In term of teacher recruitment procedures, the limited roles of DOET and BOETs lead to the poor quality of teachers that do not meet the professional requirements.

Another difficulty is that in some places the education sector is not authorized to have the full right to decide the personnel norm allocation in education and consequently DOET has to keep the good relations with provincial/city authorities. This situation results in the inconsistent structure of teachers (oversupply in some places and shortage in others).

In term of teacher rotation outside the province, all 12 provinces follow the process: on basis of statement of teacher rotation review council of the education sector, director of DOET approves the proposed list of teacher rotation to other provinces and submits it to the authority for approval. When teachers are transferred from other provinces, the authority bases on the proposal of DOET director to make final decision.

In term of administrator rotation at district levels, district people's committees are authorized to have powers but there is a shortage of coordination with the education sector in some places.

The overall assessment on personnel administration is that: if DOET comprehensively manages, personnel adoption will be appropriate with the features of the education sector and the educational development plans are actively made and effectuated. However, due to the large network in the education sector, this work is assigned to head of primary education section and thus more attention is paid to urban/city areas whereas rural areas are underestimated; at present the decentralization to districts is implemented, the education is closely approached to by people and the socialization in education is carried out better.

In response to the above situation, solutions for personnel administration under the existing context are put forward as follows: the specific regulations on roles, responsibilities and rights between the education sector and the authorities for better cooperation. Specifically, the education sector needs to play the key role in collaboration with the governmental institutions related to formulation and adjustment of personnel

development plans before submitting it to people's committees at the different levels for approval; and then the education sector has the full right to allocate its governmental staff norms, subsequently it is the crucial body for coordination with the authorities in regard of teacher and staff recruitment within the province so as to distribute to schools or schools with the sufficient capacity are authorized to recruit staff by themselves in accordance with the allowed norms under the supervision of the education sector and authorities. For the staff transfer, the decentralized levels need to be in cooperation with the education sector.

3.2. *Finance Administration:*

The outcomes of the research in financial rights on their linkage to the implementation of the educational development plan in each province/city do not show the difference in face of finance administration in various provinces. The research focuses on:

- Process for preparing and approving budget plans
- Budget allocation
- Budget distribution process
- Budget procedures.

In addition, the difficulties and solutions for finance administration are consentaneously pointed out as follows:

➤ The implementation of budget law requires schools to have the professional accountants because these employees are concurrently holding the different positions. Therefore, the permanent positions for accountancy need to be given to schools;

➤ In some places, the grant-bloc that has not taken the scale of administered areas and clues into account makes the expense source too limited, it is proposed that budget grant is realized based on the personnel administration bodies.

➤ In many places, BOETs do not manage the staff of the upper secondary schools but they still manage salary fund and draw the balance sheet of the upper secondary schools. This fact brings about the overloaded work. It is recommended that the upper secondary schools should be assigned to be self-responsible for direct balance of their collections and expenditures with banks.

➤ It takes a lot of time to receive the granted budget due to the complicated procedures; and banks monitors to each expenditure item of BOETs/schools while they do not thoroughly master the actual needs of schools and consequently, this does not timely meet the requirements of professional work and even lessens the activeness in school management, for instance, the financial division has the right to decide the budget for overtime wages of teachers but it does not stick to the actual needs; therefore, the education sector should decide the extra teaching hours for teachers;

➤ The education sector does not know its total operational budget by year in advance (excluding the salary fund), and thus it is difficult to actively prepare the educational development plan. It is recommended that the allocated budget needs to be disclosed early;

➤ When the budget plan is made, DOETs usually attach the importance to the capital expenditure rather than the operational expenditure; and this results in the difficulties in the educational activities at the lower levels. It is recommended that the grant-bloc mechanism for operational expenditure should be calculated based on the

student norm, and the priority should be given to the disadvantaged areas; the student norm based calculation needs to be integrated in the operational expenditure planning under the consideration of the characteristics of the disadvantaged regions and remote areas;

➤ It remains inconsistent in the current expenditure planning, for example, The government grants budget to provinces/cities on basis of the population norm, provinces/cities allocate budget to districts on basis of student norm; and the legal documents stipulate that the budgeting for schools is calculated on student norm, but in practice budgeting is counted on teacher norm; and

➤ It is proposed to pilot the straight budget grant to schools in accordance with the approved budget projection; the education and finance sectors play the roles of guiding, inspecting and monitoring.

4. The implementation of inspectional function:

Regarding inspectional functions, most of the ideas come to consensus that the division of responsibilities between the management levels is now appropriate.

With regards to the overall assessment on the educational inspection, most of the ideas come to agreement that: the tasks are heavy, especially in recent decentralization trend whereas the rights/powers remain limited. The difficulties and solutions are pointed out to deal with the inspectional functions as follows:

➤ Legal rationale for the educational inspection remains overlapped, lacks concrete documents, leading to difficulties in administrative penalty. Thus, the responsibilities and authorities/powers of DOET/BOET inspectors need to be further clarified.

➤ The marking scales for inspection evaluation in the existing documents are not compatible, so a consistent standard one is needed.

➤ Most existing inspectional activities need the participation of multi-positioned inspectors whereas the educational inspection process says: only official inspectors have the full legal status to evaluate (while collaborators don't fully have juridical personality). Therefore, regulations on permanent positions of educational inspectors for DOET/BOETs are needed.

- The expenditure for inspection is now limited, leading to inefficient educational inspection.

- The district/commune authorities are responsible for personnel administration, but they do not grasp the tasks of inspectors (because inspectors submit their reports on vertical channel in term of administration). On the other hand, inspectors take responsibilities in front of DOET/BOETs, while BOET director can't punish or penalty the inspectors.

5. The implementation of information function:

Regarding information function, many ideas come to consensus that: there's no detailed regulations/guidelines on responsibilities of the management levels in term of developing the educational management information system.

The report process is as follows: the schools collect data and report to BOETs, BOETs generalize these data and report to DOET, DOET synthesize the data and prepare report on its locally educational situation. However, due to the backward information system (document/data is transferred by hard-copy), unexpected statistical reports are

inefficiently made. Therefore, computerization in management and intranet development are highly recommended.

Beside, most ideas figured out the difficulties in informational function implementation as following:

➤ Statistical criteria are unclear, confusing, and need clarified definition. Statistical forms lack some titles. Therefore, specific responsibilities need to be assigned to each managerial levels and the foundation of statistical forms and report bodies also need to be regulated. And heads of educational institutions must take responsibility of the accuracy of statistical data

➤ There's still a difference in statistical data as statistical timing is varied. So, statistical timing should be fixed in the whole country.

➤ The information management system between DOET, BOET, schools is poor and it leads to the fact: BOETs do not grasp personnel information of schools that they directly administer; educational institutions can't update information regarding planning and estimated budget so they're inactive in operation especially there are some mistakes in planning process.

➤ Lack of informatics equipment, oversupply in some places but shortage in others (telephones, fax machine...) – Lack of expenditure to utilize the equipment leads to inactiveness in coordination between DOET, BOET, schools.

General comments on the decentralization in the education sector of Vietnam:

The project studying on the education decentralization in 12 provinces of Vietnam has pointed out: despite many difficulties and confusion in the initial steps, the decentralization has:

- Promoted the activeness and self-responsibilities of localities for improving primary education, especially mobilizing the social sources for education. The decentralization positively promotes the education socialization.

- Assisted localities to become more active in socio-economic planning in short and long term.

- Shared working burdens with DOET and helped DOET and other educational institutions to further focus on the education management. Nevertheless, the decentralization is inconsistent, varied in each province (especially finance and personnel management) that leads to difficulties in macro-management of the Government/ Ministry/ Branch...

- There's still confusion in decentralization, and it causes the partition of authority/ power, non-integrated, un-connected situation.

- In places where the linkage between educational sector and other sections is not good, the educational sector meets many difficulties in performing its professional function because of insufficient conditions on finance and personnel.

- Teacher employment is still intricate, slow, especially transferring teachers to other province/commune is now very complicated and troublesome.

- It is popular that DOET merely involves in professional management. This reduces the working burden for DOET. However, it is the separation of professional management from necessary conditions on finance/ personnel that easily results in an

irrational mechanism, un-harmonious deployment of teachers and causes the hurdles for the implementation of educational development plans.

The causes of the above-mentioned shortcomings include:

- There are no consistent, concrete guidelines from Government towards the educational decentralization, especially guidelines on functions, authorities, responsibilities as well as coordination mechanism between People Committees at different levels and relevant departments/ boards/ branches...
- The legal documents regarding decentralization are inconsistent; the decentralization is implemented without the renovation of institutional structure in DOET/BOETs.
- The awareness and capacity of some local administrators remain limited/poor.

School based management in Vietnam

Up to now it can be said that the school system of Vietnam is not school-based management one. This means that the decentralization mainly happens at the central, provincial and district levels but schools remain passive, dependent on the higher authorities: completely dependent in term of budget, personnel deployment, curriculum selection, student and teacher outcome assessment & examination, etc.

Some embryonic signs of school based management model can be realized in the private and semi-public schools. However, curriculum of every school in Vietnam is the same so that the quality of teaching and learning is consistent nationwide. The whole country has a national curriculum, the only textbook for all regions and all targeted students. In the coming years, this policy will more openly be considered; many sets of textbooks and optional subjects can be designed for the different kinds of students.

Some researches have recently proposed the school-based management, however, there is no mechanism to ensure that this model will be successful in Vietnam. In other words, effectiveness and self-management capacity of schools are not trusted.

Conclusion

Vietnam is in the process of building and forming the school based management under the socialist orientation and market mechanism. This is a long process and in the coming years Vietnam needs to make the further researches and implement the following tasks:

- To reformulate the functions and tasks of MOET so that it becomes the only office and the only clue to have the power on Government management in education and training. These can be considered as the fundamental and crucial conditions to implement the contents in regard of government management in the education law.
- To tighten the responsibility relationship to closely link to central ministries and branches, especially Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Welfare.
- To follow the regulations on democratic and concentrated management on a strict basis, but at the same time to effectuate the decentralization from the central level to

districts and even to schools or educational institutions in the radical, effective and strong manner. Great self-control and self-responsibility are secured and really expanded to all units.

- To finalize and issue the integrated legal documents under the education law, to amend the inappropriate articles and set up the additional laws in the education and training such as Laws on professional education, on tertiary education or on teacher, etc.

- To enhance and expand the information system and projection on education and training in the whole sector, in the local regions, in the country and in the world

- To modernize the organization and management owing to the constant development of the current information area.

- To establish the inspection system on the educational quality in the whole sector to be basis for frequent assessment and inspection on education.

- To train and retrain the educational administrators who have the upright sense, good professional knowledge & skills and management profession.

- To elaborate the typical policies so that the education and training sector has the conditions to comprehensively develop, especially the integrated policies between training and utilization.

To seek an appropriate decentralization model has been the objective of Vietnam's education for recent years and it is also our objective in this conference in order to share and learn the experience from all of you.