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Social Welfare policies in the Field of Education in Vietnam

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Abstract

Education and training are top priorities in Vietnam, with the Party and the government showing consistent interest in their development. This is evident in the Party Central Committee's resolutions on education, starting with the second resolution in 1996. The social welfare policy aimed at ensuring equal access to education is a primary concern for both the party and the government. This article explores

the general theory of social welfare policies in the field of education in Vietnam. It also delves into the experiences of other countries like the USA, Japan, and China in implementing social welfare policies in education, drawing valuable lessons for Vietnam's own implementation strategies.

Keywords: Social Welfare, Education, Vietnam

1. Introduction

The social welfare system is a component of the social development model aimed at achieving a prosperous society, a strong nation, democracy, fairness, and civilization. The operations of the social welfare system are where the "socialist orientation" of the market economy is most clearly demonstrated, where people always have, including feeling a stable and safe life, the ability to prevent shocks, and having "lifebuoys" when encountering unusual risks. For many years now, our party and state have always been interested in building and implementing social welfare policies, considering this both as a goal and as a driving force for sustainable development and social political stability.

Education and training are top priorities in Vietnam's national policy, with the Party and the government always showing interest in educational development. This is evident in the Party Central Committee's resolutions on education, starting with the 2nd resolution in 1996. The social welfare policy aimed at ensuring equal access to education is a primary concern for both the party and the government. The development of education has long been a top national policy that our party, government, and people care about. Article 61, Clause 1 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam stipulates: The development of education is a top national policy aimed at improving people's knowledge, developing human resources, and nurturing talent.

The constitution also asserts that the state prioritizes investment and attracts other sources of investment for education; takes care of preschool education; ensures that primary education is compulsory, with no tuition fees charged by the state; gradually universalizes secondary education; develops higher education and vocational education; and implements reasonable scholarship and tuition policies. The state prioritizes the development of education in mountainous areas, islands, regions of ethnic minorities, and regions with particularly difficult socio-economic conditions; prioritizes the use and development of talents; and creates conditions for people with disabilities and the poor to learn culture and vocational training.

2. Social Welfare Policy in the Field of Education

The concept of social welfare in the field of education

According to the Vietnam Encyclopedia Dictionary, "Policy is the specific standard for implementing guidelines and tasks. Policies are implemented over a certain period of time in specific fields.

It's clear that social welfare policies in education are understood as a series of government decisions aimed at addressing a social issue in the field of education, one of the four components that make up the social welfare system—a form of social assistance with basic social services. Nowadays, support for education comes not only from the state budget but is also shared by the community to help children, from kindergarten to students, have educational conditions, study to develop comprehensively, and maximize their potential. Children are given equal opportunities for learning and education; they are encouraged to develop talents, skills, creativity, and innovation. Specific manifestations of social welfare policies for education include: public primary school students do not have to pay tuition fees. Students enjoy exemptions or reductions when using public services in transportation, entertainment, when visiting museums, historical monuments, cultural works as prescribed by

the Government, policies of allowances and exemptions, tuition fee reductions for learners who are beneficiaries of social policies, ethnic minorities in areas with particularly difficult socio-economic conditions, orphans with no place to rely on, people with disabilities who have economic difficulties, people with particularly difficult economic circumstances overcome difficulties in studying, support for lunch money for children from 3 - 5 years old, school milk program and other support policies for teachers' income and physical facilities for schools... Depending on each historical period and specific social conditions, social welfare has different ways to ensure comprehensive educational development. For example, before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments and Vietnam supported free use of solutions serving training and education management for all schools, free server rental services, and bandwidth-serving distance training for universities, high schools, and secondary schools, helping the education sector effectively implement distance teaching via the Internet and television during the COVID-19 epidemic prevention period, following the principle "temporarily stop going to school but do not stop learning". You could say that a series of social welfare policies for coordinated education are implemented with the goal of fulfilling human rights commitments. They ensure that all children of school age, students, teachers, and even those in difficult circumstances can participate fairly in the education system and have the opportunity to maximize their potential. Through this, we can develop a skilled workforce for our country and elevate our societal culture. That's the essence of social welfare policies in education.

3. International Experience on Social Welfare Policies in the Field of Education

Japan's Social Welfare Policies in the Field of Education

For a long time, Japan has been recognized as a country with a gold-standard education system where children are holistically developed in both character and knowledge. So, what's the secret sauce that makes this country's education system so great? To achieve human-centric accomplishments, the Land of the Rising Sun has invested in nationwide education for centuries, earning admiration for its exemplary educational standards. One of the fundamental reasons is Japan's keen focus on social welfare in the field of education. In the election campaign of the Liberal Democratic Party, the party leader promised to ensure social welfare for all generations, including enhancing support for childrearing as a measure to increase birth rates. An income-based mechanism is implemented to reduce costs for kindergartens and preschools. If these services are provided free of charge for all children, high-income families can use their savings to provide their children with additional educational opportunities. All tuition fees for elementary and junior high schools and textbook fees are waived. There are scholarship policies for high school students who are eager to learn but face difficulties due to economic reasons. The specific content, such as the conditions for scholarships and the amount granted, varies by region. Social welfare policies in education are not only applied to public systems, but depending on each area, the Japanese government provides subsidies for children attending private kindergartens. In the scholarship system for short-term university students, vocational students, and university students, there are

scholarships from Japanese student support organizations. The timing and amount granted vary depending on the student's circumstances. And there are two types: interest-bearing and non-interest-bearing. Scholarships for international students are implemented by the Japanese government (Ministry of Education), Japanese student support organizations, local self-governing bodies, and international exchange associations.

However, building a sustainable social welfare system for the future is a political challenge for the government and parties in Japan. The aging population is rapidly increasing, with estimates suggesting that by 2025, one in every five Japanese citizens will be 75 years old. This has a significant impact on the country's social welfare. Although the cost of healthcare and nursing services is rising, the working-age population, who play a major role in contributing to the social welfare system through taxes and social insurance fees, will decrease, affecting policies for education and raising doubts about the system's sustainability. Over the past decade, the Japanese government has been grappling with this scenario. This has also prompted the government to provide more efficient subsidies while adjusting tax and social insurance methods for citizens. Moreover, it encourages improvements in social welfare, focusing more on the elderly and providing more benefits for younger generations. Currently, in Japan, both foreign and domestic workers contribute to the country's social welfare fund. Employers as well as employees contribute to the system. Each worker contributes 12% of their annual salary to the national social welfare system. Foreigners working in Japan who register and contribute to the system also have access to care and support similar to locals. Illegal workers who do not register with the government do not have to contribute to the system and are not eligible for social welfare benefits. About 14 trillion yen of total revenue from consumption tax is spent on Japan's social welfare. An amount of 7.3 trillion yen will be used to pay off debts by making the social welfare system more efficient. Due to aging and population decline, many Japanese citizens feel insecure about the sustainability of their country's social welfare system. This indicates that Japan's political parties need to present more convincing solutions on how to maintain this system. To ensure its sustainability, government officials and lawmakers should discuss issues such as increasing financial burdens on wealthy elderly people, raising inheritance taxes, and insurance fees for healthcare services. They also need to discuss whether a 10% consumption tax is enough to cover future social welfare costs or not.

China's Social Welfare Policy in the Field of Education

In China, the Social welfare Law is issued by the government, but each local authority manages it in their own way. For instance, the rate and contribution levels of employers and their employees towards various benefits depend on local jurisdiction. Contributing to China's social welfare system is mandatory for workers, employers of Chinese workers, and foreigners working in China, except for foreigners working in Shanghai. Foreigners from countries that have comprehensive agreements with China may be exempt from certain social welfare contributions within the specific scope of the corresponding agreement. Chinese employers and workers must pay monthly insurance fees into three funds: pension, health, and unemployment, while employers must contribute to two other funds

(maternity and work-related injury). Self-employed individuals, small business owners, part-time employees, and unemployed people can voluntarily participate in retirement and health insurance programs. Contributions to the social welfare fund in China are assessed based on employment income and a maximum wage limit (capped at three times the average city wage from the previous year). In Beijing, a worker's current social welfare contribution is about 10.2% of income, while an employer's contribution accounts for about 32.8% of income. However, due to population aging, the social welfare fund in some areas is becoming critical. In seven regions of China, including Hebei Province, Liaoning Province, Jilin Province, Heilongjiang Province, Hubei Province, Qinghai Province, and Inner Mongolia, there is a severe shortage of social welfare funds. The reserve fund to pay pensions in Heilongjiang Province has run out. The stagnant local economy has pushed working-age people to seek livelihoods elsewhere, exacerbating these areas' problems and making social welfare policies for education more challenging. Many poor children in economically disadvantaged areas cannot afford to go to school. Each year, nearly 14% of total state financial expenditure, equivalent to nearly 3% of GDP, is allocated to education. However, social welfare in general and specifically in education is not yet universally covered. Access to school and equality in accessing the education system for school-age children in rural areas, poor households, and people with disabilities are still limited. The state uses the budget primarily for educational welfare, considering funding for education from other sources as secondary. The proportion of funds allocated to education increases with the growth of the national economy and must be higher than the regular increase in financial income. The state encourages social organizations and individuals both domestically and abroad to donate to schools and encourages the use of loans and credit to support educational development. Local authorities have preferential policies as stipulated by the state for publishing textbooks and newspapers, learning and teaching materials, producing and supplying learning equipment, importing newspapers, teaching materials, learning tools, and research equipment for schools.

The Chinese education system is divided into four main stages, including preschool education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education and vocational training. In this system, Chinese children receive free education for nine years (from grade 1 to grade 9) in public schools. However, private and business-owned educational institutions must self-fund, although they may receive appropriate assistance from various government levels. State-run general schools include junior and senior high schools. Students only have to pay a small tuition fee for these programs and are not required to attend senior high school programs. However, due to limited social welfare, the policies for education are not fully guaranteed, leading to an imbalance in China's educational structure. General education is thin and weak. There aren't enough schools, the quality of teaching is not high, and there's a severe shortage of teachers and necessary teaching equipment. Vocational education is underdeveloped. There's an imbalance in the ratio of majors in higher education. Additionally, there's a significant disparity in education between rural and urban areas and between economically developed regions and poor regions.

Social Welfare Policies in the Field of Education in the United States

In the top 20 best universities worldwide, according to ShanghaiBangalore.com, the US dominates with 15 schools, followed by the UK. The success of American education isn't just due to teaching methods but is also significantly influenced by social welfare policies for education. The appeal of these welfare systems in the US is demonstrated through financial aid from the federal government, including in the field of education. American citizens can attend elementary and secondary schools for free at public institutions. Everyone, from urban to rural areas, rich or poor, has equal access to education. There are always full or partial scholarship policies based on a student's abilities to support talent development, whether they're American students or from other countries. The US allocates a substantial amount of social welfare funding for infrastructure, equipment, and modern technology serving education in urban and rural areas. This creates an equal environment in education that contributes to socio-economic development and enhances the quality of human resources evenly across regions.

Some UN Recommendations on Social Welfare Orientation in the Field of Education

Families need to have their needs met as a unit while also paying attention to the needs of each individual member. For single-parent families, a new emerging type, special attention is required. Nowadays, with the negative impacts of the market economy on family structures, support is needed to strengthen families and care for special members like children, teenagers, the elderly, and the disabled. However, family support services should enhance the capabilities of family members, reinforce family structures, and protect women and children. Career training is essential. Pre-marital education and support can help increase parental responsibility.

Education prevents self-destructive behaviors (addiction, prostitution, reckless living, etc.). It supports youth education to empower them to find jobs, become self-reliant, and help other vulnerable groups. Educational support policies: ensuring that all children from poor households, especially girls, have the necessary conditions for studying; Reducing disparities in the learning environment and school life between urban and rural areas, between plains and mountainous regions, between disadvantaged areas and developed regions; Waiving or reducing tuition fees and contributions for school construction for children from poor households.

4. Lessons Learned for Vietnam in Implementing Social Welfare Policies

In Vietnam, after more than 30 years of implementing reforms, ensuring social welfare has been a consistent and overarching policy of the Party in leading the country. Over time, Vietnam's social welfare work has achieved internationally recognized accomplishments such as eradicating hunger and reducing poverty for farmers in mountainous areas and regions with minority ethnic groups. State investment in social welfare is increasing, and social policies are effectively implemented from various sources, such as state capital, ODA, non-refundable aid programs from abroad, social resources from businesses and organizations, and resources from the people.

Compared to powerhouses like Japan, China, and the US, Vietnam's social welfare system still has many shortcomings, even though it was prioritized and featured in the first constitution in 1946.

It's important to note that social welfare isn't a business sector, so it doesn't directly impact the economy. Its role is to ensure the legitimate rights of the disadvantaged in society, with its key goal being to achieve social justice. A stable society is an essential foundation for economic development, and conversely, as the economy grows, it will increasingly impact the social welfare system, which is a condition for creating societal stability. From this, we can affirm that social welfare influences economic growth and societal stability.

Maintain the socialist orientation of education. The socialist direction of education is reflected through policies, especially social equity policies. To ensure this orientation, we must counteract tendencies towards "commercialization", depoliticization, and the influence of religions on education. Education is a top national policy. In the current trend of globalization and integration, Vietnam has made efforts in all aspects and achieved some encouraging successes, especially in the economic field. However, until the early decades of the 21st century, Vietnam was still ranked among the poorest countries in the world. One of the reasons for this situation is that our labor force is still limited in knowledge, school facilities are weak, lacking tools and teaching aids, and the quality of education is low. Although the state has paid great attention and allocated a large part of the budget for education, most of this is used to pay teachers' salaries (84%), so the funds for investing in physical facilities and teacher training are very small.

On another note, even though our country has a high student enrollment rate, the quality of education is not up to par. According to a World Bank report, out of 1,000 primary school students, only 500 graduate. Additionally, the quality and shortage of teachers at all levels pose a significant hurdle to improving the quality of education. The low quality of education is generally due to several reasons:

The quality of teacher training programs is subpar. Education students don't get many practical opportunities and often fail to meet teaching requirements after graduation due to insufficient knowledge and skills they've acquired or self-taught.

The treatment and salaries of teachers are low and not commensurate with the nature of the profession, so many have to juggle other jobs to earn extra income.

The investment budget for infrastructure and human resource development in schools is lacking, especially with a significant divide between urban and rural areas. Along with other reasons, our education system is facing major challenges to meet the demands of innovation.

The existing limitations in education and training have hindered the knowledge level and job adaptability of our workforce. Moreover, it has made a portion of the population unable to access modern technical achievements, lagging in business practices, and thus falling into poverty. Given this profound reality, based on the lessons learned from the social welfare education of Japan, China, and the United States, as well as the United Nations' direction for social welfare education, some lessons for Vietnam are drawn as follows:

Education is a mission shared by the party, the state, and all citizens. Given its top national policy status, education and training must be socialized. This isn't just anyone's task but a responsibility of the entire society. Every social stratum, regardless of social status, residence, or religion, needs to learn to gain sufficient knowledge and practical skills to access and effectively use new technologies. Only then can our country keep pace with developed nations worldwide in terms of economy, science and technology, and societal progress.

Developing education in line with economic and social development needs. From a macro perspective, our country's education management system is facing significant challenges in terms of quality and quantity to meet the development of various professions in society. Currently, our country's training sector structure lacks effective tools for adjustment, and many graduates cannot find jobs or are working outside their field. All of these require the state to have an education policy built on specific research, capable of meeting the demands for educational development, and suitable for the country's economic and social situation.

Implementing social justice in education A current issue in our education system is the inequality between urban and rural areas and among different regions of our country in terms of educational opportunities. Due to the impact of market mechanisms and household economic development, many children have to join their parents in production and business activities. Coupled with high education costs, many rural families have decided not to send their children to school. This is the first disadvantage in educational opportunities for rural children compared to urban ones. Additionally, there's a significant difference in investment in expanding schools, infrastructure for education, living conditions, and teacher quality among regions. These factors have led to a large disparity in literacy levels between urban and rural areas, especially in economically disadvantaged and remote regions. Even for those students who do get to attend school, the conditions for enhancing their knowledge in rural areas can't compare with those of urban students. This is because there aren't many excellent teachers concentrated in rural areas, these students don't have much time to invest in studying, and the cost of additional knowledge enhancement is also quite challenging. Along with many other reasons, there exists an inequality in our current education system that urgently needs to be addressed through effective state management tools such as policies.

Besides the policies of tuition fee exemption and financial aid for students and people with disabilities who are in difficult circumstances, there also need to be reasonable scholarship policies to support and encourage the development of talents for students with exceptional abilities.

We need to boost the Social welfare Fund for education from the budget, contributions from businesses, and philanthropists to build infrastructure and schools in ethnic, mountainous, and island areas. Especially, we should improve the living standards of educators to attract talents in the education sector and invest in equipment, textbooks, books, and modern teaching and learning materials that are in line with global development trends.

We need to create an even more equal environment for accessing a fair education system for children, students, and university students in all regions across the country.

Education can be said to be a field that directly and profoundly impacts children, students, and scholars. It plays a pivotal role in human resource development—the foundation and driving force of industrialization and modernization. Simultaneously, it's a decisive factor in ensuring rapid, sustainable economic growth. Education empowers citizens to become more knowledgeable and active voters. This helps improve the democratic process and reduces the likelihood of law-breaking among the populace. Social policies in education are significant and play an important role in enhancing education quality, enabling learners to maximize their potential, and improving the quality of human resources as a foundation for generating more material wealth for society. Investing in people through education enhances their capabilities and productivity, improving the investment environment. When all citizens, from preschool to university level, from urban to rural areas, mountainous regions, islands, disabled individuals, and those facing economic difficulties, have equal access to education, it creates a balanced development across regions. Social policies in education create prospects for disadvantaged children. A civilized society cannot ignore those of school age who are unable to attend school. A safety net in education increases the sense of economic security, thereby boosting community satisfaction.

5. In Conclusion

Education can be said to be a field that directly and profoundly relates to children, students, and learners. It plays a pivotal role in human resource development—the foundation and driving force for industrialization and modernization. At the same time, it's a decisive factor in ensuring rapid and sustainable economic growth. Education empowers citizens to become more knowledgeable and active voters. This helps improve the democratic process and reduces the likelihood of law-breaking among the populace. The social welfare policy in education has significant meaning and plays an important role in enhancing education quality, enabling learners to maximize their potential, and improving the quality of human resources as a foundation for creating more material wealth for society. Social welfare in the field of education is essentially an investment in people that enhances their capabilities and productivity, improving the investment environment. When all citizens, from preschool to university, from urban to rural areas, mountainous regions, islands, people with disabilities, and those facing economic difficulties, are given equal access to the education system, it creates balanced development across regions. Social welfare in education provides prospects for children, starting at disadvantaged points. A civilized society cannot ignore those of school age who are not attending school. A safety net in education increases feelings of economic security, thereby boosting community satisfaction.

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