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The Current State of Welfare Policies for Learners in Specialized Schools in Vietnam

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Abstract

Alongside the general education system, there are specific groups of learners who are catered to in specialized schools and other educational institutions. These include boarding ethnic minority schools, semi-boarding ethnic minority schools, university preparatory schools, specialized schools, talent schools, schools for the disabled, and reformatory schools. This article explores the current state of these

specialized schools in Vietnam and the welfare policies for students in these institutions. It highlights both the achievements and limitations in implementing welfare policies for students in these specialized schools. From this, it proposes several solutions to improve welfare policies for students in these specialized schools in Vietnam.

Keywords: Social Policy, Specialized Schools, Vietnam

1. Introduction

You could say that education is 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 behind industrialization and modernization. At the same time, it's a decisive factor in ensuring rapid, sustainable economic growth. Education empowers citizens to become more knowledgeable and proactive voters. This helps improve the democratic process and reduces the likelihood of law-breaking among the populace. Social welfare policies in education are significant and play an important role in enhancing educational quality, enabling learners to maximize their potential, and improving the quality of human resources as a foundation for generating more material wealth for society. Social welfare in education is essentially an investment in people that enhances the capacity and productivity of the workforce, improving the investment environment. When all citizens from preschool to university, from urban to rural areas, mountainous regions, islands, people with disabilities, those facing economic difficulties have equal access to education, it creates balanced development across regions. Social welfare in education offers prospects for children starting from disadvantaged points. A civilized society cannot ignore those of school age who are unable to attend school. A safety net in education increases feelings of economic security, thereby boosting community satisfaction.

The policy of vocational training and job support for people with disabilities reflects our commitment to helping them overcome insecurities, feelings of resignation, and even despair. It creates jobs and stabilizes the political and social culture. This policy embodies our nation's tradition of equality among citizens, maximizing the talents and contributions of people with disabilities to the country's economic development.

Social welfare can boost the level of education in society. A higher level of education is linked to better personal health for those with more education and their children. Parents' higher education levels are tied to their children's higher education levels. The higher education level of workers is connected to a higher productivity rate among their colleagues. This creates a positive ripple effect that helps the economy grow sustainably.

Specialized schools, as defined in Articles 61 to 64 of the Education Law, include Boarding Ethnic General Schools, Semi-boarding Ethnic General Schools, University Preparatory Schools, Specialized General Schools, Artistic and Sports Talent Schools, Schools and classes for the disabled, and Pedagogical schools within the national education system. This article explores the welfare education policies for students in these specialized schools and other educational institutions.

2. Types of Specialized Schools in Vietnam

Specialized schools and other educational institutions are outlined in Articles 61 to 64 of the 2019 Education Law, including the following types of schools:

- Boarding ethnic general schools, semi-boarding ethnic general schools, and university preparatory schools.

Articles 61 of the 2019 Education Law regulations for boarding ethnic general schools, semi-boarding ethnic general schools, and university preparatory schools are as follows: The state establishes these types of schools for students who are from minority ethnic groups or families that have long-term residence in areas with particularly difficult economic and social conditions. Boarding ethnic general schools, semi-boarding ethnic general schools, and university preparatory schools are given priority in terms of teacher allocation, physical facilities, equipment, and budget.

So, the government establishes boarding ethnic general schools, semi-boarding ethnic general schools, and university preparatory schools specifically for students from minority ethnic groups and those from families who have long settled in areas with particularly challenging socio-economic conditions. These boarding and semi-boarding ethnic general schools, along with the university preparatory schools, are given priority in terms of teacher allocation, physical facilities, equipment, and budget.

Currently, there are 319 boarding ethnic high schools across 50 provinces/cities under the Central Government with 97,157 students. Among them, there are 57 provincial schools, 262 district-level schools, and 45 district-level ethnic boarding high schools that offer both junior and senior high school education. There are also three ethnic boarding high schools directly under the Ministry of Education and Training: the Viet Bac Highland General School, the Friendship 80 School, and the T78 School. The country has 28 provinces with ethnic minorities, hosting a total of 1,097 schools and 185,671 students.

University Preparatory Schools: Currently, there are four schools including: Central Ethnic University Preparatory School; Sam Son Ethnic University Preparatory School; Central Ethnic University Preparatory School in Nha Trang; Ho Chi Minh City University Preparatory School. Additionally, there's the Viet Bac High Mountain General School and various university preparatory departments within universities (Preparatory and Source Creation Department-Tay Nguyen University; Ethnic University Preparatory Department-Can Tho University; University Preparatory Department - Tra Vinh University). The annual target is about 4,000 students; the scale of university preparatory schools in recent years ranges from 800 to 900 students; the scale of preparatory departments ranges from 100 to 200 students.

- Specialized Schools, Talent Schools

Articles 62 of the 2019 Education Law regulations for specialized and talent schools are as follows: Specialized schools are established at the secondary education level for students who excel academically. These schools aim to develop talents in various subjects, ensuring comprehensive general education, nurturing future talents, and meeting the country's development needs. Talent schools in arts, physical education, and sports are established to cultivate students' abilities in these areas. The government prioritizes the allocation of teachers, infrastructure, equipment, and budget for state-established specialized and talent schools; there are preferential policies for talent schools established by organizations or individuals.

So, specialized schools are established for students who

excel academically, aiming to nurture their talents in certain subjects. This is based on ensuring comprehensive general education, creating a talent pool to meet the country's development needs. Schools for arts, physical education, and sports are set up to develop students' talents in these areas as per legal regulations.

The specialized school system was established back in 1966. Currently, there are 9 specialized schools affiliated with universities. All 63 provinces and cities in Vietnam have specialized high schools, totaling 75 schools. So, the total number of specialized schools in Vietnam is 84.

Artistic and athletic talent schools: There are no such schools at the central level (only talent training in Intermediate, College and University majors in performing arts, physical education and sports). At the local level, these schools are established in almost all localities. Currently, these schools are in the process of merging, streamlining and have not yet reported data.

- Schools for People with Disabilities

Articles 63 of the 2019 Education Law regulations for schools and classes for people with disabilities are as follows: The government establishes and encourages organizations and individuals to set up schools and classes for people with disabilities. This is to help them regain their abilities, learn culture, acquire skills, and integrate into the community. The government prioritizes the allocation of teachers, facilities, equipment, and budget for state-established schools and classes for people with disabilities. There are also preferential policies for schools and classes for people with disabilities established by organizations or individuals.

The government always shows favoritism towards individuals with disabilities. Therefore, it encourages organizations and individuals to establish schools and classes to help disabled people regain their functions, learn culture, acquire skills, and integrate into the community. Currently, there are no official statistics on this type of school.

- Remedial School

Articles 64 of the 2019 Education Law regulations for remedial schools are as follows: Remedial schools have the responsibility to educate juveniles who have violated the law. This is to ensure that these individuals are trained, develop healthily, become good people, and have the ability to reintegrate into society.

It's clear that the role of reformatory schools is to educate juvenile offenders, helping them to grow, develop positively, and become good citizens capable of reintegrating into society. Currently, Vietnam has four reformatory schools, including three under the Ministry of Public Security and one in Vinh Long province.

3. Current Status of Welfare Policies for Learners at Specialized Schools in Vietnam Welfare Policies

* Scholarship policy (Decree No. 84/2020/ND-CP dated July 17, 2020)

This is a long-standing policy that has been in place for over 20 years. Here's what students at specialized schools are currently entitled to:

- For students at preparatory colleges, boarding ethnic high schools; vocational education trainees for veterans and disabled people: The scholarship is equal to 80% of

the basic salary per month;

- For students who are war veterans from poor households studying in vocational education institutions for the disabled and war veterans: The scholarship equals 100% of the basic salary per month.

The policy scholarship is granted for a full 12 months per year, and the number of years of study under this policy should not exceed the maximum number of years or semesters required to complete the corresponding training program as per regulations. Specifically, for the final academic year, it is granted based on the actual number of months studied.

* Encouragement Scholarship (Decree No. 84/2020/ND-CP dated July 17, 2020)

This scholarship is aimed at students from specialized schools, talent schools who have won awards or medals, or have good academic and training results, and have conduct grades of good or higher.

- For specialized schools, art, physical education, sports schools: The scholarship amount for a student per month is at least three times the current tuition fee of the local specialized high school;
- For specialized high school students in the scholarship amount for a student is determined by the university principal, but it should not be less than the current tuition fee that the student has to pay at the school;
- For schools that do not charge tuition fees: The minimum scholarship amount should be three times the ceiling tuition fee of the local high school.

Scholarships are granted per semester and for nine months in the academic year.

* Other provisions for boarding students of ethnic minority general schools and preparatory ethnic minority universities (Joint Circular No. 109/2009/TTLT/BTC-BGDĐT)

In addition to the policy scholarship program, students at residential ethnic general schools and ethnic university preparatory courses also enjoy other benefits. These include a reward system: If they study well and achieve good results (from the previous school year), they can receive rewards of 400,000 VND for good performance, 600,000 VND for excellent performance, and 800,000 VND for outstanding performance. They are also provided with personal items such as individual blankets, mats, and uniforms; travel expenses once a year (round trip) to visit their families during Tet or summer vacation. They receive annual educational support; textbook assistance through borrowing from the school's shared bookshelf; funding for health check-ups and annual health examinations for students, purchase of health insurance, and regular medication for students.

* The vocational training and educational equipment provision for students in the field of media arts (Decision No. 82/2005/QĐ-TTg dated April 18, 2005, and Decision No. 41/2014/QĐ-TTg dated July 21, 2014)

Students studying traditional and specialized art subjects in cultural and art schools enjoy a monthly vocational training allowance of 20%, 30%, or 40% of the full scholarship

value, depending on the subject they are studying. In addition, students are provided with school uniforms each year. The type and quantity of uniforms depend on each subject and field of study.

* The policy for students in educational nurturing schools

You'll get to enjoy various cultural learning programs, career guidance, vocational training, and labor. You'll be issued certificates for cultural studies and vocational training by the reformatory school, which are as valuable as those from general education and vocational institutions. You'll also get to participate in cultural activities, arts, sports, reading newspapers, watching TV, and other recreational activities organized by the reformatory school. You'll benefit from the food and clothing provisions for students, Guaranteed standards for rice, vegetables, meat, fish, sugar, fish sauce, cooking oil, MSG, salt, and fuel; On holidays and festivals you get to eat up to 5 times the standard daily meal. You'll enjoy the accommodation and living essentials provisions for students: Every year, students are provided with clothes, blankets, mats, mosquito nets and other living essentials; female students are provided with additional necessary personal hygiene items. You'll benefit from the healthcare services for students at the reformatory school such as: Regular health check-ups; In case of illness or injury you will be treated at a healthcare facility.... The cost of medical examination and treatment is covered by the reformatory school. The cost of drug rehabilitation and HIV/AIDS treatment for students is in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Finance.

* Policy for learners at vocational training centers for inmates in the prisons of the Ministry of Defense (Joint Circular No. 11/TTLB dated December 20, 1993)

For juvenile offenders, vocational training is mandatory, and the prison organizes these courses for them. For other inmates, depending on the conditions, capabilities of the prison, and the inmate's wishes, the prison may provide vocational training. The duration of an inmate's vocational training depends on the type of skill and the prison's capacity; they can be guided to learn a skill while producing products. After their training, inmates are allowed to take graduation exams, skill tests, and receive certificates or diplomas as per general regulations.

Current Status of Funding for Implementing Specific Policies for Specialized Schools in Vietnam

Funds are allocated to implement preferential policies for pupils and students of traditional arts subjects.

Table 1: Actual funding for implementing preferential policies for pupils and students of traditional arts subjects 2021-2022

Unit: million dong		
Contents	2021	2022
Total	9.387	17.362
Decision No. 82/2005/QĐ-TTg	7.206	14.423
- Expenditure on vocational training regime	4.224	10.734
- Expenses for study equipment	2.982	3.689
Decision No. 41/2014/QĐ-TTg	2.181	2.939
- Expenditure on vocational training regime	1.958	2.694
- Expenses for study equipment	223	245

* Funding for policy implementation for students of ethnic boarding high schools and ethnic university preparatory schools.

Although this is a very important document, the funding source is not currently tracked separately for the following two reasons:

- The policy scholarship regime overlaps in terms of subjects, accordingly, pupils and students studying at ethnic minority boarding schools and university preparatory schools are entitled to benefits. Regulations in Decision No. 82/2006/QĐ-TTg and Decision No. 152/2007/QĐ-TTg – funding for implementing these policies has been monitored separately.
- In reality, university preparatory schools/university preparatory departments are only available at the Ministry of Education and Training, not in any other ministries or central agencies. However, even at the Ministry of Education and Training, the funding for implementing Circular No. 109 is not allocated as a separate expenditure item.

Funding allocated for university preparatory schools is about 80-100 billion VND/year, of which there is no separation between which funds are for policies and which are for regular expenses.

4. Evaluating the Implementation of Social Welfare Policies for Students in Specialized Schools in Vietnam

* *Achieved results*

The overall quality of education in ethnic regions has been significantly improved, with many positive changes: Ethnic boarding and semi-boarding schools now organize two teaching sessions per day, adhering to knowledge and skill standards. They also conduct various activities for nurturing and health care of students, cultural exchanges, arts, physical education, life skills education, career guidance, vocational training. All aimed at holistic development of minority ethnic students. The rate of mobilizing minority ethnic students of school age has increased, and the learning environment in semi-boarding ethnic schools has helped minority ethnic students to quickly access Vietnamese language; the dropout rate has decreased, contributing significantly to the consolidation and maintenance of universal primary education and universal lower secondary education results; enhancing literacy and developing human resources in minority ethnic areas, mountainous areas, regions with particularly difficult economic - social conditions, border areas and islands. The teaching and learning of six minority ethnic languages continue to be implemented.

Up until now, comprehensive welfare policies in education aimed at students from disadvantaged groups have been implemented across all levels and fields of study, covering all those in need. It's fair to say that Vietnam has virtually no gaps left in its welfare policies for learners.

One of the standout results of Vietnam's social policies is the detailed and specific classification of beneficiaries. This is most evident in two comprehensive policies: the regular tuition fee policy issued in Decree No. 86/2015/ND-CP and the short-term vocational training support policy (under 3 months). In these policies, dozens of groups have been compiled and classified into various support policies, based on a principle.

- Those who are disadvantaged or belong to more vulnerable groups receive higher levels of support,

while those who face fewer hardships receive less assistance.

- The support policy or level of assistance at higher education levels will be less than at lower levels. For instance, with the tuition fee exemption policy, all kindergarten and elementary school children with parents classified as poor are exempted from tuition fees.

* *Limitations*

The reality is that there are still many limitations in our current cross-sector statistical and forecasting work. For instance, information about the number of five-year-old children in particularly difficult areas who are not from poor or near-poor households; the number of students exempted or reduced from tuition fees at each educational level; the number of beneficiaries of education policies increasing when applying new poverty standards... all require the collaboration of many localities, based on statistical guidelines under the responsibility of various ministries such as the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Ethnic Minority Committee,... The coordination between these ministries and localities has not been truly effective, the directives for statistical work are not comprehensive, and their accuracy is not high leading to financial policies often being inflated in practice, causing difficulties in balancing the budget, as well as affecting the beneficiaries.

A certain group (for instance, people from impoverished ethnic communities, those living in particularly challenging areas, or individuals with disabilities) can benefit from multiple policies at once. These policies often overlap in terms of their names and the support they provide. For example, there are policies for educational support and for covering educational costs, as well as social welfare allowances and monthly/annual social grants outlined in various documents. The term "Policy Scholarship" is used across multiple document systems.

There's no specific policy or system in place for students with athletic talents: Currently, the government has issued Decree No. 152/2018 / ND-CP on November 7, 2018, which stipulates some regimes for coaches and athletes during concentrated training and competition periods. This includes salary policies, training support, and competition for athletes of provincial and departmental talent teams. However, team athletes and students of sports talent schools are two completely different groups; students only receive a salary when called up to the talent team. At the same time, the policy of the talent team is a salary policy, which is fundamentally different from the support policy for students. Sports talent schools are also classified as specialized education. Therefore, the lack of a support policy is a significant disadvantage for students at these schools.

The monthly vocational training regime for students in cultural and artistic fields, as stipulated in Decision No. 82/2005/QĐ-TTg, doesn't apply to private school students, while Decision No. 41/2014/QĐ-TTg does. This creates a disadvantage for those studying subjects like traditional opera, folk singing, reformed opera, court dancing and singing, circus, dance, choral music, wind music, string music, percussion music, cinema, and fine arts at private schools. Moreover, the regulation of the monthly vocational training regime for students in cultural and artistic fields

with 40% of the value of a full encouragement scholarship is no longer suitable. The concept of "full encouragement scholarship" is defined in Decision No. 1121/1997/QĐ-TTg dated December 23, 1997 and Decision No. 239/1999/QĐ-TTg dated December 28, 1999 with an expenditure level of VND 120,000 per month for university and college students and VND 110,000 per month for professional secondary school students and vocational teachers.

Even so, by 2007, in carrying out the tasks assigned in Decree No. 75/2006/ND-CP of August 2, 2006, by the Government detailing and guiding the implementation of some provisions of the Education Law, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Decision No. 44/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT on August 15, 2007, about encouraging scholarships. This decision eliminated the concept of full encouragement scholarships and instead established three scholarship levels: Good, Excellent, and Outstanding. Up to now, Decree No. 84/2020/ND-CP continues to maintain these three levels of encouraging Good, Excellent, and Outstanding.

Besides, the term "vocational training mode" doesn't quite capture the essence of the policy. In reality, it's more like a financial aid for learning costs.

The policy of providing scholarships to all students at ethnic boarding schools, residential schools, and university preparatory schools is not appropriate. These schools are often located in the heart of communes, districts, and even large cities (like the Ho Chi Minh City University Preparatory School). The initial purpose of these schools was to educate ethnic students and scholarship students. However, with the development after 30 years of implementing ethnic policies, these schools now mainly provide secondary education (with 57 schools offering integrated secondary education) for three groups: ethnic students, scholarship students, and non-minority students. State support for this group is not appropriate as they are not considered vulnerable, and these schools are not in particularly difficult areas, even being in large cities.

Students who are not from minority ethnic groups currently receive a sudden increase in support equivalent to 80% of the basic salary, (calculated based on the current basic salary of 1,490,000 VND, it increases about 4 times). Thus, this is a significant policy loophole. In the context of a tight state budget, providing support for those who are not part of vulnerable groups will limit the effective use of the state budget.

▪ *The Solution*

We need to build a database system for policy subjects. This is an incredibly important issue to address the duplication of subjects, and it's also the most crucial factor in constructing and balancing resources to implement social security policies.

We're extending support to students of traditional arts at private schools. These are students studying various forms such as opera, folk singing, reformed opera, court dancing and singing, circus, dance, vocal music, wind music, string music, percussion music, cinema, and fine arts. The content and level of support are similar to those provided to students at public schools.

Implement special provisions for students with athletic talents. Sports-focused schools are also classified as specialized educational institutions. Students in these schools are potential athletes for high-performance sports.

The uniqueness of this field of study/training is that students have high nutritional needs, face a high risk of injuries, have a short career span, and find it difficult to find jobs. Therefore, it's absolutely necessary to supplement policies to support students in sports-focused schools.

Adjust the regulations on policy scholarships for students who are not from minority ethnic groups at boarding ethnic general schools and university preparatory courses:

- On organizational structure: Ethnic boarding high schools and university preparatory schools are all located in centers where other general education facilities exist. Therefore, it's worth considering merging these schools and focusing solely on their educational function. The management of ethnic boarding students should be separated (like the dormitory model in universities). This not only reduces overall costs by improving teaching efficiency, but also significantly cuts down the preferential allowance (70%) of teachers currently teaching at ethnic boarding and university preparatory schools.
- About the policy scholarship is only for students at residential ethnic schools and university preparatory students who are from minority ethnic groups or selected candidates. It does not apply to Kinh students studying at these schools.

Expand the authority of local governments in policy-making for social welfare: current regulations only delegate decision-making power to provincial authorities for specific regimes. However, in reality, daily operations are managed by district and commune-level authorities. Therefore, for issues that are highly practical, diverse, urgent, and directly affect vulnerable groups, a stronger delegation mechanism is needed for district-level governments to proactively implement necessary support policies.

5. Conclusion

The development of education has long been a top priority for our Party, State, and people. As stated in Article 61, Section 1 of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, advancing education is a national policy aimed at enhancing intellectual standards, developing human resources, and nurturing talent. The state prioritizes educational development in mountainous areas, islands, regions with ethnic minorities, and areas with particularly challenging socio-economic conditions. It also prioritizes the use and development of talent and creates conditions for people with disabilities and the poor to learn culture and vocational skills. This article delves into each welfare policy for students in specialized schools in Vietnam. It also highlights the strengths as well as the existing limitations and proposes solutions to improve these policies.

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