

Educational Leadership Challenges: Vietnam's System of Higher Education

My Phuong Thanh Ho

Dennis Berg

Abstract

There are long lists, published in numerous reports, recited at numerous conferences, contained in numerous newspaper articles, of the challenges facing the systems of education, and especially the system of higher education, within Vietnam. Vietnam is a country that has been invaded, occupied and ravaged by war on more than one occasion, which struggles to retain its dignity, protect its values and find its balance as it moves forward trying to provide a better life for its people.

While the challenges of educational management and leadership are apparent through out all systems of education in Vietnam; this paper, focuses on the institutions of higher education. In the past, many have pointed to wars and poverty as the root cause for the challenges facing education in Vietnam. We, on the other hand, would suggest that while the country lacks in the area of resources, both financial and human, the larger impacts today have to do with how the resources are used.

There is no doubt that one of the keys to unlocking the aspirations and abilities of this remarkable nation lies in the area of educational leadership. We must also acknowledge that we believe Vietnam presents a unique and special set of problems for those who pursue research related to leadership and change.

The key educational leadership challenges facing Vietnam are discussed in an effort to articulate an educational leadership research agenda for the country. The five major areas covered include:

- The centralized control and administration of the educational systems;
- The strong resistance to change at all levels of education;
- The lack of trained and experienced human resources, both in quantity and quality;
- The lack of institutional history or continuity, dramatic changes with leadership changes;
- The high level of global isolation and lack of global integration.

These discussions lead to the identification of a set of research agenda themes. Our position is that Vietnam's agenda for research in the area of educational leadership and management will not be a traditional agenda. Rather, the agenda is likely to be unique and challenging in its need to understand the complex dance between society, government and education.

Studies that focus on description; what are the management styles currently in practice? How much educational leadership is evident among today's academic leaders? What has been the level of educational exposure by the academic leaders to formal training in the areas of management and leadership? What has been the level of experience in positions of management and leadership?

- Studies that compare the state of affairs in Vietnam with other nations, similar or dissimilar in circumstances.
- Studies that focus on the forces in Vietnam that are preventing the adoption of known improvements in the areas of leadership and management?
- Studies focusing on the transition from centralization to decentralization in the educational systems of Vietnam. What is the evidence of the transition in the educational systems? Where does the current state of affairs place Vietnam in relation to other systems of education?
- Studies that attempt to quantify the levels of integration across nations. Have there been measurable impacts of globalization on educational leadership in Vietnam?
- And finally, studies should explore the extent to which leadership and best practices management that are found in Vietnam have been able to impact educational functioning and student achievement?

This paper is not an academic article on the system of higher education in Vietnam; it is a discussion of a possible research agenda in the area of educational leadership within in the country. It is not meant as a full analysis of the system of higher education, but rather a brief introduction to the major challenges thought to form the core of potential research activity.