The Socialization of Education Policy in Vietnam:
Pursuing Quality Education for Children with Special Educational Needs
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Abstract
With the Education 2030 agenda of “inclusive and equitable quality education,” regular schools become focal points of the debate about quality education, and international agencies consider local context when considering these questions. However, there is always a dilemma: all children study at the same school, but each child has their own educational needs, and there are few studies addressing this problem. Against that backdrop, this study focuses on Vietnam where a unique policy has been adopted: the Socialization of Education. It aims to enhance government authority, to mobilize community and foreign resources, and to promote privatization. While 99% of Vietnamese elementary schools are state-run and include children with disabilities in inclusive education, privatization contributes to an increasing number of people-founded centers that provide education and medical intervention outside schools to meet special educational needs. The study conducted a policy analysis using effective history, and revealed that the Socialization of Education policy gives an impetus to out-of-school activities within the formal education framework of the socialist regime. The result implies that it is necessary to consider quality education beyond regular schools, and not only to consider local context but to devise mechanisms whereby out-of-school activities function within the national education framework.

Background
Twenty-five years of promoting the Education for All (EFA) movement has created new issues while making great strides in disseminating education. One issue concerns the quality of education for marginalized children, particularly children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). In particular, disability became a critical issue after it was reported in the 2010 EFA monitoring report as “one of the least visible but most potent factors in educational marginalization.” Therefore, there has been increasing awareness of SEN since the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in 1994, by which inclusive education in regular schools came to be regarded as “the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.” In short, because the EFA
reaches many countries, SEN, particularly regarding disability, is on the table for consideration. Consequently, educational policies regarding inclusive education are increasingly popular, using terms such as “inclusive,” “inclusion,” and “inclusiveness.” They are also on the Education 2030 agenda, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

However, regarding disability issues, problems are not monolithic, particularly in developing countries. Although it cannot be denied that local context matters, anecdotes indicate that people involved in inclusive education in developing countries tend to blindly follow the international community without recognizing local realities. This tendency is driven by the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006.

No one can refute the ideal concept of inclusive education, but some criticisms of the discourse exist. Byrne (2013) points to a contradiction between “inclusion” and “support,” the latter of which is in tandem with individual “deficit.” Fundamentally, inclusive education aims to reform educational systems, aiming to lead to accommodating children with all types of SEN. However, how could that be achieved in countries with underdeveloped educational systems that lack resources? Grech (2009) suggests that exporting the inclusive educational model becomes problematic, stating that “it is grounded in and highlights the concerns of western, white, urban, educated disabled academics in industrialised settings,” and the problem is “‘universal discourse,’ which like most standardized notions, runs the pervasive risk of being contextually and culturally inappropriate.” In line with this perspective, we must recognize “the danger of international orthodoxies,” particularly in the inclusive policy arena.

From this perspective, Peters (2007) sheds a light on international discourses on inclusive education. She takes the position that “[t]he philosophy of inclusive education is based on the right of all individuals to a quality education with equal opportunity.” Then, she reveals that “progress in shifting from medical model to a social model of disability has not been linear, nor is it explained by traditional historical analysis” and the “progress toward a social model of disability has not been even or continuous,” by means of the perspective of effective history. Effective history is “an interpretive lens that uses of language, rather than chronological time, as a point of reference” in policy documents that enables us to recognize that “the relationship between historical events and social contexts are unpredictable and fluid tangle of events.” Although Peters focuses only on the discourse, her perspective brings new insights to discussions on regular schooling for children with disabilities.

As seen in the Salamanca Statement, the principle of inclusive education concerns
“enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise,” and the international community has recognized “the necessity and urgency of providing education for children, youth and adults with special educational needs within the regular education system.” Based on those statements, the interpretation of “inclusive education system at all levels” in CRPD could mostly be understood as occurring in regular schools, although, as stated above, disability issues are not monolithic and must consider another side of inclusive education.

In this context, this study describes the Vietnamese educational system that adopted an inclusive education policy through the 1990s and analyzes it by means of effective history in the domestic policy arena. The study’s focus is on the Socialization of Education policy to draw on local context as educational policy implementation. Following Peters’ insight that “[t]his focus on language and policy as discourse reveals effective history, allowing a critical analysis that delves beneath the chronology of policy as event,” the study reveals the phenomena behind the Vietnamese discourse on inclusive education by investigating private centers as pervasive out-of-school activities. The study’s results provide implications of unintended policy effects and the potential educational environment.

Methodology

This study has three analytical phases. The first phase describes the Vietnamese policy of inclusive education, generally referred to as hòa nhập (inclusive) education, and explains how that policy disseminates to the entire country as a national educational policy, particularly regarding regular primary schools. Peters (2007) reveals that progress toward a social model is not continuous, which is found through this study’s analytical framework. The study also juxtaposes policy documents focusing on the discourse of Vietnamese hòa nhập education and explores how it has been inserted into the Vietnamese educational policy documents. The second and more important phase of the study describes the development of private educational centers for children with disabilities, particularly those with developmental disabilities. Last, beyond regular school, this study suggests a perspective on the educational environment. From its analysis, this study offers an implication as a potential model of the educational environment.

Educational Systems for Children with Disabilities in Vietnam

Several pilot projects to implement hòa nhập education were implemented in Vietnam during the 1990s. Although an educational model for children with disabilities
to study with those without disabilities was introduced in 1987 in several provinces, an overall inclusive educational project was launched in 1991 in at least seven provinces and municipalities: Tiền Giang; Hồ Chí Minh; Hà Nội; Huế, and others. However, at that time, the term hòa nhập education was not particularly common, and the term hội nhập (integrated) education also was used. Because the international educational policy discussion was experiencing a paradigm shift from “integration” to “inclusion,” those concepts were mingled in educational policy in Vietnam. Contrary to those concepts, the project disseminated educational practices for children with disabilities to some regions.

The year 1991 was pivotal in Vietnam for education in general as well as for children with disabilities because the first educational laws, the Law on Universalization of Primary Education and the Law on Child Protection, Care, and Education, were passed, both of which led to the establishment of the Vietnamese educational system. Establishment of the system was driven by the ratification for the Convention on the Rights of Child, of which Vietnam was the second ratifying nation with its quick response in 1990. Thus, Vietnam was greatly influenced by international agencies and the consensus of international society.

Despite its international commitments, the Vietnamese government could not afford to provide educational institutions with budgets, materials, teachers, and administrators. The Vietnam Communist Party adopted a policy at its eighth National Congress in 1996 to mobilize resources from local communities and other countries, known as Socialization of Education. The policy emphasized the contributions to education made by local people, local enterprises, and other countries, and the authority of the state remained and, even, intensified.

Following that policy, the government issued Decree No. 73 in 1999 to promote privatization of education, comprising the bán công (semi-public), dân lập (people-founded), and tư nhân (individual) modes, which were jointly referred to as tư thực in the educational arena. Shortly after establishment, the government abolished bán công, but it continued to promote dân lập and tư nhân for privatization. However, primary education remained under state control, and, currently, 99.4% of Vietnam’s regular schools are public, but in practice national.

Regarding legislation on education, the government passed an Ordinance on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 1998. This was the first legal document in which
hòa nhắp education was mentioned as an official educational policy. Before the 1998 ordinance, the concepts of hòa nhắp and hội nhắp were resemble, but, when the 1998 ordinance used the term “hòa nhắp” as official policy, implementation for educating children with disabilities became pervasive. In 1998, the first comprehensive law on education also was passed, which led to a reinforcement of formal education.

Table 1. Educational Policies for Children with Disabilities in Vietnam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Policy document</th>
<th>Contents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Adopted giáo dục hội nhắp (integrated education) via UNESCO</td>
<td>Terms hội nhắp and hòa nhắp mingled</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Pilot project on education for children with disabilities</td>
<td>Implemented in several provinces</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
<td>Advocated for child rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Law on Universal Primary Education and Law on Child Protection, Care and Education</td>
<td>The term giáo dục hòa nhắp (inclusive education) became pervasive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Socialization of Education</td>
<td>Mobilized resources and privatization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>The Education Law, The Ordinance on Disabled Persons</td>
<td>The term hòa nhắp in legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Steering Committee on education for children with disabilities</td>
<td>Monitored education at the province and district levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Ministry Decision No. 23 on giáo dục hòa nhắp</td>
<td>Inclusive education for the entire country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Signed Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>National action plan launched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Law on Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>Inclusive education became a major means of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Ratified Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</td>
<td>Launched the next national action plan</td>
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In 2002, the government established the steering committee for education of children with disabilities under the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), and at the provincial level. Steering committees were intended to cooperate with regular schools, special schools, and inclusive educational development centers. Then, in 2006,
MoET issued Decision No. 23 to implement **hòa nhập** education throughout the entire country. In 2007, the government signed the CRPD, established the national action plan for persons with disabilities, and prepared to establish the law to ratify it. After years of effort preparing the draft and several expert committee meetings, the Law on Persons with disabilities passed the national congress in 2010. This law defines **hòa nhập** education as a mode of education in which children with disabilities study with children without disabilities in educational institutions (article 2-4) and as a major means for educating children with disabilities (article 28-2). In 2015, the government ratified the CRPD (Table 1).

As analyzed above, although the Vietnamese concept of **hòa nhập** education was ambiguous, particularly during the 1990s when it was mingled with another term, its basic idea was that children with disabilities should study with children without disabilities, and it was continuously oriented toward the consensus of the international community. Therefore, because the international community was experiencing a paradigm shift from integration to inclusion, the Vietnamese government paid close attention to the international conventions. That is, the discourse on **hòa nhập** education in Vietnam was developed with changes in international consensus, which meant that policy was a continuously external orientation rather than a focus on the domestic situation.

Figure 1. Vietnamese Educational System
Contrary to that policy discourse, the current Vietnamese educational system, particularly regarding primary education, is controlled by the state. It is generally a two-track system (Figure 1) in the regular public school formal educational system, which accounts for about 99% of primary-level schools that educate children from about age six to about age 11. Moreover, although the Socialization of Education policy mobilizes local community and foreign resources for education, privatization rarely occurs at the primary level. Private institutions are gradually increasing at other educational levels, but of the 15,361 primary schools, 15,266 (99.4%) are public. According to article 4-1a of the primary school regulations, the central government establishes primary schools and guarantees their annual budgets, and, thus, “public” effectively means “national.”

There are 7,202,767 students in primary education in Vietnam, and there are 1,316,227 children with disabilities; about 52,711 of the children with disabilities participated in hòa nhập education, and about 16,000 participated in special education. Although the ages of children with disabilities range from zero to 16 years old, it is reasonable that access to education is limited for children with disabilities. Given that situation, where do children with disabilities go for school? Table 2 presents assumed options regarding their educational opportunities.

Table 2. Educational Opportunities for Children with Disabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Assumed Opportunities</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular School</td>
<td>All schools must implement inclusive education, but it depends on the principals and conditions vary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special School</td>
<td>Some special schools implement inclusive education by accepting children without disabilities, but some parents do not prefer their children to attend special schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Home</td>
<td>Although it is rare, group of parents might cooperate to nurture and educate children with disabilities on their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Tutor</td>
<td>Educational laws ban teaching activities for financial gain, but they are pervasive, even in special education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Center</td>
<td>Private centers have recently grown in popularity and provide educational services.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Although hòa nhập education should have been implemented in all regular schools by Decision No. 23, in reality, not all regular schools can appropriately
accommodate children with disabilities. Also, continuing educational activities should provide vocational training at institutions, such as community learning centers, particularly in remote areas. However, regarding education for children with disabilities, this is not the case. In addition, following article 2-4 of the Law on the Persons with Disabilities, special schools can implement hòa nhập education by accommodating children without disabilities on one hand, few parents of children without disabilities want to send their children to special schools, particularly those whose children have mild developmental disabilities, on the other hand.

Aside from the government-controlled options, alternatives exist for educating children with disabilities. One option would be for parents to open their homes to accommodate children with disabilities and to provide educational and nursing services, which is structured as voluntary cooperatives among parents. However, in Hanoi, only a few such opportunities are available, and many parents are waiting to get their children into these settings. A second option would be to request that special education teachers provide care for children with disabilities. Although Vietnam prohibits teaching activities for financial gains, some parents’ accounts indicate that those activities are pervasive for children with or without disabilities. The third option is private centers, which recently emerged to provide educational and nursery services at some expense to parents. Private centers, particularly in Hanoi, are focused on below.

Dissemination of Private Centers

The fieldwork for this study was conducted from August 10 to August 18, 2016, focusing on Hanoi to investigate the policy’s influence in the capital. There are a variety of types of private centers and no monitoring system exists. Therefore, the objective centers of the fieldwork were identified from a list of 46 educational/medical institutions for children with disabilities, five of which were private centers. In Vietnam, trung tâm (centers) are different between those managed by organizations and those run by individuals and in scale. This study defines “centers” that are distinct from organizations and public offices as “private” centers.

According to the director of Medisch Comite Nederland-Vietnam (a non-governmental organization in Hanoi), who has worked for private centers, there are 14 or 15 “centers,” and “70% of them” are private. Additionally, there are four or five private centers that recently opened in the past two or three years. In this study, those private centers are divided into two groups: those run by organizations and those run by individuals.

The first group comprises private centers run by organizations as companies. The
center termed “A” was established in 2010, and it registered as a limited liability company for the Hanoi Authority for Planning and Investment (HAPI) in Hanoi. Its signboard reads: “limited liability company special school A.” The director studied psychology as an undergraduate and then became involved in educational activities for children with disabilities. He stated that he conforms to the legal systems in the first place and staff lives in the second place and that he develops the center as a company to provide social security to the staff. In addition, he was receiving support from the parents of children with disabilities, which he used to establish the center as a company regarding document procedure, buildings, and so on. Currently, A center provides its services to five areas, has 33 teachers, and serves 134 children with disabilities. Its financial situation depends on parents’ payments, which are, on average, VND five million (USD 225) per child, and A center receives neither financial support from the government nor contributions from the local community. However, some parents cannot afford to send their children to the center. Regarding education, A center uses alternative methods different from the MoET guidelines and teaches basic skills, such as reading, writing, math, and social skills.

Similar to A center, B center registered as a limited liability company for HAPI under the official name, “Limited Liability Company Hòa Nhật Education Counseling B.” Before establishment in 2014, the director ran pilot activities with parents (since 2012). She confirmed that the educational method was effective, and then registered the private center as a company. The director had studied psychology as an undergraduate, and she had no expertise running a company. Moreover, B center depended on parents’ payments, received no support from the government, and there were no donations or contributions from the local community. However, B center has five teachers, two to three staff members, and accommodates 14 children from ages four to six. It provides several courses, such as per-hour, half-day program, and full-day program. The fees are VND 130,000 (USD 58), VND 2.5 million (USD 112), and VND five million (USD 224), respectively. In addition, although B center introduces some regular school education for parents and children in some cases, it neither cooperates with the regular schools nor has any particular connection to them. In short, although this private center began as an informal cooperative endeavor with parents, the basic discipline remained the same after it became a company, which is to closely cooperate with parents.

There are similarities between A and B centers. One similarity is that, although the directors do not have expertise to run their businesses, they cooperate with the parents who need them. Another similarity is that the private centers cannot be expected to serve as bridges to the regular school and they provide their services separate from the general
educational system.

Individuals run the second group of private centers, which means no registration for HAPI. C center was established in 2002, and the director is a doctor concerned about the problems faced by children with disabilities, particularly developmental disabilities. She expressed dissatisfaction with the general educational system for children with disabilities, and she stated that she hoped to provide a better educational service through her private center. C center is registered with the Hanoi Relief Association for Handicapped Children, a mass organization in Vietnam. Through the Hanoi Relief Association for Handicapped Children, C center accepts volunteers from foreign countries, which totaled 187 people from 26 countries. Currently, C center has 18 teachers serving 65 to 70 children from age two to age 11, including 18. It sets low fees for parents who to send their children to the center. Fees range from VND two million (USD 90) to VND 2.5 million (USD 112) per month, which often is discounted to between VND 500,000 (USD 22) and VND one million (USD 45). C center does not cooperate the regular schools, but its curricula follow the MoET guidelines, particularly the curricula established by the Vietnamese Institution of Educational and Science.

Next, D center was established in 1995, and its director also is a doctor who experienced special education in the Netherlands, which led her to establish the center. She stated that, “at that time, educational sector as well as medical sector did not understand educational situations of children with disabilities.” Her motivation derived from her dissatisfaction with public education for children with disabilities. D center obtained contributions and developed its scale. Currently, it has 85 teachers in special education, primary education, and psychological counselors, and it accommodates 170 to 180 children with disabilities, two-thirds of which are tự kỷ (autistic) and others who suffer from cerebral palsy. D center is registered with the Vietnam Relief Association For Handicapped Children, which is an upper mass organization of the Hanoi Relief Association for Handicapped Children. D center provides a basic five-day program during the week, and the classrooms are equipped with video cameras. Moreover, there are cafeterias for job training, gardens for vegetables, and a swimming pool. Fees are comparatively higher than at the other private centers, but the daily life program only costs VND 2.5 million (USD 112), although sometimes it is as high as VND four million (USD 179). Because 30% to 40% of the parents are poor, D center gives discounts of VND one million (USD 45) to VND two million (USD 90).

Last, E center was established in 2012 by a researcher at the Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences. It provides educational services mostly to children with “autism.” The director explained that the reason the center was established was that, although
centers for children with autism are necessary, there were few at that time. As a researcher, the director applied her research to her practice and the scale of the center is relatively small. There are six teachers accommodating 14 children from age three to age 14. E center provides three basic courses: per hour, half-day, and all-day. The fees range from VND three million (USD 134) to VND five million (USD 224) as a basic amount. E center is registered with the Vietnam Association for Promoting Education, an organization belonging to MoET, so that some of the children can obtain scholarships because there are neither financial supports nor contributions. The director develops digital educational content and plans to cooperate with businesses in the future. Currently, the curricula follow the MoET guidelines, but the director attempts other methods to provide educational services.

The private centers run by individuals are based on the educational ideologies of the individual directors, and, instead of financial support, they benefit by registering with organization. However, there also cannot be found cooperation with regular schools.

Discussion

This study’s analysis found that Vietnamese hòa nhập educational policy is still externally oriented while the terms of the policy are mingled. In this situation, the vast majority of the children with disabilities are excluded and do not have appropriate educational opportunities. That is, the international-oriented policy does not pay enough attention to the realities of children with disabilities. Children with disabilities have access to private centers, which are increasingly popular, but are outside of the general education system. Arguably, Socialization of Education, which aims to mobilize local community resources for school education, encourages people to believe that it is necessary for them, instead of the regular schools, to personally educate children with disabilities, which tends to lead to the establishment of private centers. Private centers are not officially regarded as schools, but, in practice, private centers provide basic education for children with disabilities who are not being accommodated by regular schools. This outcome ironically leads children away from the national educational system, which implemented hòa nhập education, and can be understood as an unintended consequence of Socialization of Education.

In addition, although dân lập (people-founded) and tư nhân (individual) schools are promoted within general education system because of Socialization of Education, private centers emerge outside of the general education system as institutions run as company or by individuals (Figure 2).
Private centers still have problems to overcome. One problem is that there are no monitoring systems and, thus, parents who need these centers must seek out the better centers without formal assistance. Moreover, as far as was observed by this study, no private centers officially interact with the formal educational system, and, thus, their educational services tend to be different and cannot be expected to prepare children for entry into the general educational system. Therefore, even if private centers were to provide relatively better education, children with disabilities would still be marginalized from the general educational system.

In conclusion, the results suggest two things. First, although local community resources are mobilized for the educational system, people with resources tend to invest in educational activities outside the regular school system, partly because of disappointment with the general educational system. Second, although the private centers are increasingly popular, parents who need the services for their children cannot determine which centers are most appropriate and available because there is no monitoring system and no link to regular schools. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a system to monitor the private centers to provide this information to parents in need.

Last, I recommend the establishment of a bridge program between regular schools and private centers and a monitoring system to assess the private centers. To build an inclusive society with the local context, we need insight into quality education beyond regular school, and the quality of education and cooperation among educational choices.
for children with disabilities could be improved with a broad perspective.

**Short Bio**

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**References**

8. Interview for Lê Văn Tác, director of the Special Education Research Center at the Vietnamese National Institute of Educational Sciences on November 7, 2014.
9. Lê Văn Tác explained there should be seven provinces and municipalities, but he only confirmed four of them.
17. The list was provided by Hoàng Thị Nho, vice dean of faculty of special education, Hanoi National University of Education.
Interview on August 11, 2015