

Open and Distance Education in Vietnam

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A. Introduction

The development of open and distance education (ODE) has been closely associated with the history and development of the country. ODE was first introduced to Vietnam in 1960. In the first phase of its development between 1960 and 1986, ODE mainly took the form of correspondence courses, evening classes and part-time courses provided by state institutions. Its purpose was to meet the country's needs for economists, technicians, skilled workers and teachers. During the war period (1965 - 1975), despite the disruption caused, local centers for part-time education were established in most of the provinces in northern Vietnam. After 1975 and re-unification, ODE aimed at reconstructing the country.

Education tried to cater to a wide range of needs, including around half a million demobilized soldiers. However, the efforts were directed towards too many targets, and were too heavily subsidized and centralized to be effective. To remedy this, major education reforms were initiated in 1979. In 1986, influenced by the radical changes in the world,

Vietnam introduced new policies and reforms, centering on the notion of “renovation” and “open door” policy. This led to the expansion of educational opportunities and greater diversification of forms of education, including ODE.

In the early years of the 21st century, the educational system entered new and overall reforms. Especially, in 2005, many important policies were released to renovate and promote ODE.

B. The Role and Nature of ODE

Open and distance education has played an important role in the changes for development of the country. The term “open learning” has a very particular meaning that is different to its meaning in international literature and practice, where it generally refers to a set of values relating to the removal of barriers to learning and access, flexibilities of provision, choice on the part of learners and provision of resources to support learning.

Open learning has been considered as renovation in comparison with the system in the past, which had been heavily centralized and subsidized. The term “distance education” was used loosely, for over a decade, to refer to several arrangements of teaching and learning. These included courses where teachers were sent to distance locations to provide face-to-face teaching sections, courses where students registered with an institution then studied through “self-learning” either with or without learning materials being provided, the provision of educational radio or television programs, or part-time courses providing

summer schools of face-to-face teaching in between periods of "self learning". For a long time, ODE in Vietnam placed a heavy reliance on face-to-face teaching and the teaching approaches, curriculum and methodology were close to those found in traditional institutions.

For a few years now, the concept of ODE has been changed, which is closely to the meaning recognized internationally. Since the early of 21st century the Government has been conducting the overall renovation in the educational system in general and the improvement of ODE in particular. It has been stated *"Strategic planning of the national education system for training the human resources should integrate with mainstream education and ODE, introducing Internet and LAN to the educational institutions for teaching, learning and researching"* (9th Congress Document of the Leading Party, 2001).

The Prime Minister's Direction (December, 28th 2001) pointed *"Development of ODE should be regarded as a measure to mobilize the whole country to build a learning society, creating opportunities for education to all people; priorities will be given to the open universities including technologies, equipment, material, etc. so that distance education could be improved and developed"*. Equality for educational opportunities has been assured. There has been a wider range of choice for learners to choose, suitable for their personal conditions and status, as all modes of education have been approved of by the Education Law. Education for the people in rural and remote areas has been paid much attention to by the Government.

ODE has been used as an effective solution to improvement of human resources in general and rural development in particular.

ODE in Higher Education

(Source: Ministry of Education and Training, 2005)

No	Institutions	Academic area	Media and Technologies
1	Hanoi Open University	Management, Laws, Foreign Languages, Tourism, Computing, Accounting, Technologies	Print, Multimedia, CD, VCD, TV, Radio, Video Conferencing, Internet
2	Semi-Public Open University in Ho-Chi-Minh City	Economics, Social Science, Foreign Languages, Asian studies	Print, TV, CD, VCD, Radio
3	Hue University	Teachers Training, Management, Law	Print, CD, VCD, Video Conferencing,
4	Hanoi Pedagogic University	Teachers Training	Print, CD, VCD
5	Danang University	Economics, Foreign Language	Print, CD, VCD
6	National University in Ho-Chi-Minh City	Computing	CD-ROM, Print, Internet
7	Hanoi University for Foreign Studies	Foreign Languages	Print, Multimedia, CD, VCD
8	University of Post and Telecommunication Technology	Computing, Technologies, Management.	Print, VCD, CD-ROM, Internet

Major Providers of ODE in Higher Education
(Source: Ministry of Education and Training, 2005)

No	Institutions	Students in Particular Academic Areas	Total Enrolment
1	Hanoi Open University	Economics (management and accounting): 14,518 Laws: 6,644 Foreign Languages: 1,617 Technologies: 244 ICT: 966	23,996
2	Semi-Public Open University in Ho-Chi-Minh City	Economics: 6,946 Social Science: 449 Technologies: 1,229 English: 600	9,687
3	Hue University	Teachers Training: 31,098 Management: 3,202 Law: 5,000	39,300
4	Hanoi Pedagogic University	Teachers Training: 29,127	29,127
5	Danang University	Economics: 4,239 Foreign Language: 520 Technologies: 1,101	5,760
6	National University in Ho-Chi-Minh City	Computing: 8,515	8,515
7	Hanoi University for Foreign Studies	Foreign Languages: 5730	5,730
8	University of Post and Telecommunication Technology	Computing, Technologies, Management.	2,500

C. ODE and the Role of Hanoi Open University

1. Mission and Organization

Hanoi Open University (HOU) is the soul public open university in Vietnam. Since 1993, ODE has been used to meet changing labor market needs and unmet demand for higher education. The market economy has generated new motivation to learn, either for advancement in the workplace or for change of occupation. ODE has been also used by many students at traditional universities, who simultaneously enroll in Open University courses in order to add computing, English skills, etc. to their degree subjects, in preparation for a competition job on graduation.

Distance education operation and research are the important tasks given by the Government. Currently, HOU is the key provider of distance education in Vietnam. The needs for education and continuous retraining really exist and become more popular in the community, especially in the market-oriented economy.

Besides, the tradition of learning and hard-working of the people to improve themselves and the policy of the Government to promote distance education are the stable foundation for developing distance education at HOU. Distance education is the only solution to many people who are not able to take face-to-face courses for various reasons. The ODE programs really create opportunities to the people in islands, remote and mountainous regions.

2. Courses and Enrolment

Hanoi Open University has eight faculties, offering courses in business management, accounting, information technology, biotechnology, industrial designing, English language, telecommunication, law, fashion design, architecture, and tourism. There are two categories of courses offered by HOU including degree courses and non-degree ones. Currently, there are over 44,000 students taking degree courses, of which there are 24,000 distance education students. To support the students HOU cooperates with 40 local centers in provinces and cities throughout the country.

3. Technologies

The major technologies used for distance education in Vietnam are print, radio, television, CD and VCD. The same technologies are used in ODE at HOU, of which print is the prominent medium. On-line and web-based courses have recently been introduced to improve the information sources to students. In March, 2004 HOU started a video conferencing system connecting HOU with the local centers, which enables two-way communication effectively. Non-degree programs are provided by HOU via the National Television, Hanoi Television and Vietnam Radio. These programs include business management, rural development, English for tourism, business English, trading, environment protection, etc. to meet the needs of millions of people throughout the country.

D. Policy and Regulations of ODE

The Government conducts the overall direction for the development of ODE by issuing policies for macro implementation. The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) is the executive institution and in charge of the development of ODE in terms of theory and practice. The MoET directs the educational institutions through "The Regulations for Operating Distance Education", which includes seven chapters consisting of 46 articles. The educational institutions are supposed to strictly operate in line with the regulations, including structure and content of courses, accreditation system, degree and certification, report and record, etc.

Each institution has its own regulations for operation of certain courses or programs, assuring the success and effectiveness. As the national regulations are strictly obeyed, the degree and certificate are, by law, recognized throughout the country.

A new renovation in education is now beginning in Vietnam. The National Assembly has released a Renewed Law of Education to meet the demand of the new era of development. The Government's Strategy of Education and Training Development identifies the goals (among others) of quality improvement, increased levels of education and training, the creation of skilled and flexible workforce, recognition of the importance of life-long learning. The Strategy for building a Learning Society has been approved of. It includes ODE as one means of building Learning and Knowledge-based Society.

The year 2005 was marked by the three macro policies for educational development including ODE. In May, the strategic guideline "Building a Learning Society towards 2015" was released by the Government". In July, the Decision coded 164/2005/QĐ-TTg was signed by the Prime Minister to promote distance education development towards 2010. In November, the Government released the Resolution coded 14/2005/NQ-CP to direct the overall reform in higher education towards 2020. ODE has been seen as the measure to solve the question to balance quantity and quality in higher education.

Є. Funding of ODE

The policy of "Socializing Education" has been implemented for a few years. This mobilizes all available resources of the society for the development of education, and in return, education is for everybody in the community. The Government creates favorable conditions, such as land for construction, loans from State Bank with low interest, etc. to encourage developing education of all forms and modes.

However, each institution has its own conditions and status, tries to balance the finance. Therefore, the tuition fee varies from one institution to another. Besides, the cost of a certain program is different from one to another, depending on the requirement for media and instructional materials used, etc. Some projects are subsidized by the Government and international institutions, such as Teachers Training Project, Environment Protection Project, etc.

For these programs, students have to pay lower tuition fees. Early in July 2005, the Prime Minister signed the Decision to approve of the MoET's proposal namely *"Promoting Distance Education 2005 – 2010"*.

This is the first macro scheme that the Government claims to invest such a big amount of money (100,000,000 USD) to improve the ODE system. According to the Prime Minister's Decision, Hanoi Open University and four other institutions: Semi-public Open University in Hó Chi Minh City, University of Post and Tele-communication Technology, Hue Pedagogic University and Hanoi Pedagogic University will be provided with modern equipment and technologies for distance education development. Consequently, millions of learners will certainly benefit from this project. ODE in Vietnam is really entering a new stage of development.