

THE INTEGRATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS INTO THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM - A MILESTONE FOR PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN VIETNAM

• Assoc.Prof. Ph.D. Tuong Duy Kien*

***Abstract:** On the 5th of September 2017, the Prime Minister signed the Decision No.1309/QĐ-Ttg approving the Project entitled “The Integration of Human Rights into the National School Curriculum”. This was as a political and legal event of great importance as it contributed to institutionalizing the viewpoints and guidelines of the Party and the policies and laws of the Government of Vietnam on the respect, protection and promotion of human rights in the new period, simultaneously reflecting the commitment and obligations of Vietnam to the international community on human rights education. The integration of human rights into the national education system has marked a significant change in the public awareness and in the practical activities to further promote human rights in Vietnam to a new level.*

***Keywords:** Human rights, Project on human rights education.*

1. The significant change in public awareness about human rights education at schools

Human rights education plays a crucial role in the social lives as it helps to enhance the public awareness, prevent and restrict the violation of human rights for lack of understanding. Thanks to this, every citizen is equipped with knowledge, skills and promote

their beliefs, awareness as well as meaning and values of the rights to protect their own rights, simultaneously compliant with the law and respectful of the dignity and the rights of others.

The Communist Party of Vietnam and the Government have long attached great importance to human rights especially since initiating Doi Moi Process. It is deeply understood that

(*) Director of Human Rights Institute, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics.

human rights could be achieved by the tremendous efforts of the working class and the oppressed nations across the world. Human rights are set out from the desire for independence and socialist. As a result, the respect, protection and promotion of human rights during the current period have considered both an objective and a driving force for the national socio-economic development. The Party and State have been actively involved in the establishment and completion of the human rights policies and the implementation of corresponding activities at global scale as well as the fulfillment of international treaties' commitment on human rights¹.

In the current context of Vietnam and the world, a number of regulations have been issued, including: Directive No.12-CT/TW dated 12 July, 1992 by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party on "Human Rights Issues and the Party's Viewpoints and Guidelines"; Directive No.41/2004/CT-Ttg dated 02 December, 2004 by the Prime Minister on "Further Enhancing the Protection and Fighting for Human Rights in The New Period". The viewpoint of Vietnamese Party and State on human rights issues and rights and obligations of the citizen has been highlighted in both documents, with the education and popularization of human rights as the focus of the socialist system's activities. However, there

have been a number of shortcomings in propaganda and education on human rights due to various internal and external factors, such as the public awareness that 'human right issues are being deeply politicalized'. During the periods of economic hardship in Vietnam and social chaos in Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, the hostile forces took full advantage of the situation to attack the socialist nations (i.e. through human rights issues). At that time, human rights were not paid proper attention as a leading task of the nation and as a factor to promote social development by officials and state officers, as well as Party members. Rather, human right issues were seen as a war-provoking instrument by the Western countries. Simply put, it has long been seen as a sensitive political issue and received very little attention, resulting in the inadequacies of the human rights education.

Based on the summary of 18 years of implementing the Directive No.12-CT/TW on "Human Right Issues and the Party's Viewpoints and Policies", the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party continued to issue the Directive No.44-CT-TW dated 20 July, 2010 on the "Human Right Issues In The New Context" which corresponded to the situation of the nation after 20 years of reform (Doi Moi) and aligned with the international perspectives on human rights education.

It is notable that human rights education was strongly focused on this new Directive. Accordingly, “human rights issues were expected to be integrated into the national school curriculum and the content for education would be specifically relevant to particular groups of people.”²

The good news was that encouraging achievements in human rights education has been made. Currently, human rights are being integrated into the national curriculum at certain levels. For example, the related contents are now included in the co-curriculum syllabi of several subjects at secondary schools, such as Civic Education, Ethics Education and Literature. At tertiary level, human right issues have been incorporated into some academic courses, including: Constitutional Law, Administrative Law, Criminal Law, Criminal Procedures, and Public International Law. In 2008, “The Theory and Law on Human Rights” became an official course to be delivered in the School of Law (Vietnam National University) and then in the Ho Chi Minh City University of Law. Currently, human rights issues are being integrated into the academic syllabi of such majors as Law, Administration and Internal Affairs at many Universities.

At post graduate level, the Master Course on Human Rights Law is now being implemented at the School of

Law (Vietnam National University), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics.

Human rights education for state officials and civil servants has been provided since 1998, with Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics (tertiary level, politic major) as the pioneer. From 2015, the themes of The Viewpoints of Vietnamese Communist Party on Human Rights were added to the graduate curriculum for advanced politic majors (both regular and irregular programs).

Apart from official programs, the non-official ones also cover human right issues. Typical examples can be seen in the training courses (technically supported by international organizations) on human rights, children’s rights, women’s rights, gender equality which are given by the Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, National Assembly’s Committee for Youth and Children, and many departments or agencies at both central and local levels.

Thanks to such educational programs, the awareness of state officials, Party members, civil servants and students has been significantly enhanced, contributing to the national sustainable development. The values of human rights and the Viewpoints of our Party and the State on human rights



Comrade Nguyen Xuan Thang, Secretary of the Party Central Committee, President of Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics is making his speech at the Conference on Summarizing the Activities of 2017 and Planning for the Assignments of 2018. Source: hcma.vn.

have been included in school curriculum, accordingly, the public awareness and the violations of human rights in Vietnam would also be better handled.

However, there have been a number of shortcomings in the education of human rights in Vietnam:

- Firstly, there is a lack of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, up-to-date and consistent curriculum which are human right-based (this is the most commonly used approach by international organizations).

- Secondly, the knowledge about human rights integrated in the curriculum is insufficient for certain groups of learners. Plus, the contents on the Party and State's viewpoints and policies on human right issues have not been delivered adequately. As the

result, learners are not well-equipped with knowledge in identifying and criticizing wrong and hostile views on human right issues in Vietnam.

- Thirdly, the human right contents integrated in the educational institutions are not consistent. Rather, the syllabi are heavily influenced by each organization's viewpoints about the importance of human rights.

- Fourthly, the educational managers, teaching staff, learners and the public in general are not well-equipped with fundamental human rights knowledge, which badly affects their ability to carry out related tasks in reality.

- Fifthly, the teaching and learning materials about human rights are very limited, which negatively affects the education's quality and effectiveness.

Given the significance of human rights education in the context of national development, the Prime Minister had assigned the Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics and the Ministry of Education and Training to implement the Project on the Integration of Human Right Issues into the National Curriculum. This was also in line with Vietnam's commitment to the international institutions and with the Directives issued by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Party. On the "National School Day" (the 5th of September) in 2017, the Project was officially approved by the Prime Minister. This important event has marked a turning point in the public awareness about the significance of human rights education to gradually eliminate the unfair prejudice about a "sensitive" and "politicalized" issue. It will be helpful for the Vietnamese viewpoints on human rights to be compatible with the world.

2. A significant change in educational activities to promote human rights in schools

Once human rights education is incorporated in the national curriculum at all levels, it is expected to develop better understanding and appreciation for human rights among learners, teachers and educational administrators. Accordingly, students are supposed to learn about human life values; protecting their own rights and

respecting others' rights and freedom; taking civil responsibilities and fulfilling obligations toward the nation and society to form well-developed personalities; toward building a rights-respecting culture that suits Vietnamese identity and corresponds with the human right culture of the world.

According to these mentioned educational objectives, the teaching contents must be suitable for each level and discipline with a logically consistent structure making a change on practical activities to protect and promote the human rights as follows:

- *At preschool levels*, children are expected to develop an understanding of fundamental rights, appreciate other opinions and become good listeners. A friendly relationship between teachers and children should be established. Teaching staff and educational administrators are supposed to be fully aware of human rights and have responsibility in respecting and protecting children. It is illegal to have physical or psychological violence against children at any circumstances.

- *At primary schools*, students are expected to acquire fundamental knowledge about human rights, citizenship rights and responsibilities in learning and respecting teachers as well as friends. They should know how to protect their own rights, express their opinions and thoughts to parents

and teachers. Teaching staff and educational administrators should understand their responsibilities and obligations, show their respect and protection for students, and create the most favorable learning environment for learners. It is illegal to have any physical or psychological violence against children at any circumstances.

- *At junior secondary schools*, students should acquire certain basic knowledge about human rights and children's rights. They have understanding of their rights, how these rights are protected by the nation, family and school according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Vietnamese Constitution and Laws (especially Children's Law in 2016), which behaviors are considered as child abuse. Simultaneously, students should be guided on how to protect their rights, acknowledge others' rights, and show respects for others' both inside and outside the school.

- *At senior secondary schools*, students should acquire certain basic knowledge about human rights at a higher level compared to junior secondary school students. They should understand the meaning and value of human rights in everyday life, the importance of protecting human rights. In addition, they are expected to develop skills in protecting their own rights as well as others' rights, to build and reinforce their respect for human

rights, citizenship, tolerance, equality, national and international solidarity. Teaching staff and educational administrators should be equipped with the knowledge of human rights and children's rights. Plus, they understand the meaning and value of rights and the importance of respecting and protecting students' fundamental rights and freedom. Human rights violations by teachers and educational administrators must be curbed and averted.

- *At vocational schools*, students should be equipped with basic knowledge about human rights, civil rights in accordance with international standards, especially the principles of the International Labor Organization about labor standards and labor rights. Additionally, national and international human rights mechanisms, skills of applying human rights to professional activities, rights and obligations of employees and employers in labor relations, dispute resolution related to the rights of employees should be included in the curriculum.

- *At tertiary levels*, students should be equipped with basic knowledge about human rights in accordance with international standards and the Party and Government's policies about human rights so that students can reinforce their beliefs and have the appropriate attitude and behavior. Thereby, students are expected to have a greater awareness of

civil rights and obligations to protect their rights and respect others right and freedom. Additionally, students should be aware of their responsibilities toward the society and nation. This curriculum is supposed to help students better prepare for their future as a citizen with well-behaved manner and with full understanding of their various relationship in the society.

- *At higher education levels*, students are expected to gain advanced and extensive knowledge of human rights. They should have professional skills to promote and protect human rights in the society, to prevent human rights violations by public authorities and social entities. When students have profound knowledge, they could understand the importance and noble value of human rights. They should be able to identify the achievements and limitations of the human rights education, then able to propose constructive solutions to complete the Party's policies and State laws on human rights in line with Vietnamese context and international standards. Accordingly, the process of regional and international integration, as well as development of the law-based Socialist Republic of Vietnam will be promoted.

3. Significance of the Project to the full development of human personality with the sense of respect and protection of human rights in the society

The effective implementation of the Project has made great political, moral and educational contributions to the creation of the new generation of Vietnamese citizens who are fully aware of others' dignity and human rights. This also further promotes the rule of laws and rules in Vietnam from different perspectives:

- The Project has created a significant change in the public awareness at all levels about the importance of human rights and human rights education in Vietnam. It has been seen as a major political long-term task by every functional agency and the implementation of the Project requires continuous, appropriate and consistent plan-making and policy-making, with effective coordination between relevant agencies. The integration of human rights education into the national curriculum at all levels is expected to enhance the public awareness about law-abiding attitude, which further promotes the democracy-based rules of law.

- The implementation of this Project has highlighted the great efforts made by the Party and State of Vietnam in enforcing international treaties on human rights, especially in terms of human rights education. This will further enhance the image and status of Vietnam to the world.

- The effective implementation of the Project is expected to create a

human rights-oriented culture in the new era, which diversifies the legal climate of Vietnam. The right approach in human rights education will be the foundation for good behavior and manner in the society, and for the development of the new generations with full awareness about human rights, liberty, justice and fairness. The respect and protection of human rights will definitely become a common cultural value and this may serve as a standard to evaluate individual and social civilization.

- Once the human right issues have been integrated in the national curriculum, the involvement of the whole political system is compulsory. This will create fundamental changes in terms of both academic curriculum and realization of educational goals, which contributes to the implementation of the Resolution approved by the 8th Congress of the Central Committee, on the Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Education and Training; Strategies for educational development and vocational training in Vietnam in line with that of the international community.

- Human rights education is expected to enhance learners' awareness about dignity and values of human beings, about respecting the laws and respecting others' rights, taking their own responsibility and obligation as a citizen; Humanity and tolerance is the

base for national and international standards on human rights to be established. This is also the great achievement gained by enormous efforts of Vietnamese people and other nations in the world. Accordingly, the violation of human rights will be handled, the citizens will become better behaved and law abiding. ■

References:

(1) As a member of the Human Rights Commission (2001-2003), a member of the Human Rights Council (2014-2016), a member of ASEAN Intergovernmental Committee on Human Rights, Vietnam proactively participated in many related activities to protect and promote human rights. Until now, Vietnam has signed and approved and joined 7/9 international treaties on human rights.

(2) The Steering Committee on Human Rights of the Government, Permanent Office, Summary of the implementation of the Directive No.12 – The Secretariat of the Party Central Committee on “Human Right Issues from the Party’s Perspectives”. Political and Administrative Publishing House, Hanoi, 2012, p107-108.