

Facility Use in Instruction in Vietnam

Background

Educational system in Vietnam has encountered a sea of difficulties as compared to other regional countries as Vietnam has struggled a great deal after the war time. Most of the schools in Vietnam are not well-equipped with modern technologies. The majority of the teachers come to classrooms with limited resources. That is why they are supposed to make good use of what they are provided to create the best learning atmosphere for their students.

At the outset, education is regarded as the top national policy. It is clear that educational development is a must. To carry out educational objectives, textbooks need to be renewed and the teaching methodologies need to be updated to suit new learning demands of young generations. One of the new teaching methodologies has been assumed to be the application of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the classrooms (Viet Bao, 2011). It facilitates better access to the promotion of learning community establishment.

During the past few years, the volume of basic knowledge students are instructed has been larger than before especially in such subjects as natural sciences, mathematics, computer sciences and foreign languages. Many Vietnamese gifted students have made good accomplishments in international examinations. However, many other students are weak in their knowledge application. Their understandings of social knowledge are rather limited. Furthermore, it is not notoriously difficult to notice that there is quite a clear difference in the level of students between urban and rural areas. It is understandable, but this difference illuminates that Vietnamese government needs to have well-defined actions to bridge the gap in the knowledge volume for students from different areas of the country.

Teaching facilities have been enhanced in recent years (Ha Noi Department of Education and Training, n.d.). Library books and equipment have been significantly supplemented. Nonetheless, the equipment varies. In other words, schools in such big cities as Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, Da Nang, etc., are better-equipped with facilities than those in rural or mountainous areas. A big number of schools in these areas are really in need of lab and practice rooms. Many students cannot study both in the morning and in the evening due to the shortage of classrooms at their disposal. A lot of schools have been under slow construction owing to the lack of funding from the government.

Facility use in Teaching and Learning in Vietnam – Current Status

Centralized textbooks

In the recent compilation by National Library of Vietnam (2006), there have been a total of fifty-five publishing houses in Vietnam. Nonetheless, only the Education Publishing House is responsible for mass-publishing textbooks utilized in schools. In an interview on August 3rd, 2010, Mr. Vu Ba Hoa, Director of Education Publishing House, revealed that it printed ninety million textbooks for students from grade one to twelve to start their new academic school-year 2010-2011 (Bao Moi, 2010). Mr. Vu emphasized 55% of printed materials were edited to keep students updated of new knowledge. In spite of being edited, the price of textbooks remained unchanged. As textbooks are centralized in Vietnam, teachers rely totally on textbooks to perform in classrooms.

Textbook centralization helps unify core curricula for the whole country. It helps facilitate national exams because teachers know what students will be tested on. It also ensures the quality of education across the country. In addition, teachers have the syllabi, so they have

the knowledge of what they are going to teach in their classrooms. They do not have to spend their time brainstorming the content of textbooks. What they need to do is good preparations for lesson plans whenever they enter their classrooms. Normally, the results of student performance in urban areas are much higher than those in rural or mountainous areas. It proves that students in those disadvantaged areas do not study as well as students in cities. It is completely comprehensible; however, it is also a drawback of textbook centralization. It is common knowledge that students in cities have more convenience in their studies than students in other areas. They have good access to resources and supplementary reference materials. Schools in cities are surely better-equipped with teaching facilities. Likewise, teachers in cities usually have better performance. Teachers in underprivileged areas do not have other teaching facilities except textbooks and blackboards, so they need to be more creative in their teaching to ensure their students do not get off track. Besides, most of the students in disadvantaged areas have to struggle for life due to their poverty. They need to earn their living from really young age. Therefore, it prevents them from staying more focused on their studies. Due to the lack of resources, teachers and students in disadvantaged areas have ostensibly bigger obstacles that bar them from their performances. As such, textbook centralization is, in some extent, unfair for students and teachers who reside in areas of limited resources.

Teaching facilities

As aforementioned, blackboards, commonly known as chalkboards, are the most frequently used in Vietnamese classrooms. It is not exaggerating at all to utter out that blackboards and textbooks are close companions of Vietnamese teachers. Almost every classroom in disadvantaged areas is still equipped with blackboards. In all likelihood, they are user-friendly and less costly. No one can deny the effects of blackboards in classrooms. Even in

big cities like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, teachers still use blackboards for most of their teaching. One of the reasons why blackboards are still in use is supposedly because of their familiarization with teachers. They do not want to have other teaching facilities for a change. The other reason is the limited funding from the government in the upgrade of modern technologies in schools. With the hardship in funding, it is hard to radically change blackboards at a time. Beneficial though they are, chalk dust from blackboards is harmful to both teachers and students' lungs should they have regular and direct contact with it on a day-to-day basis.

Besides blackboards, to minimize negative effects of blackboards on teachers and students' health, some schools are equipped with whiteboards with the ingrained beliefs that they are cleaner and user-friendlier. Though whiteboards are not much more expensive than blackboards, only a few schools in urban and rural areas use them as it is not easy to control the number of markers used in the classrooms. Apart from the boards, cassette players and radios are also utilized in literature and foreign language teaching. Nevertheless, they are not equipped in every classroom.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam (MOET) has encouraged teachers to apply ICT in their teaching. That is why many schools are well-equipped with LCD projectors and computers which help them with lesson plan design. Because LCD projectors are rather expensive, each school has been provided with one or two depending on the funding from MOET and the scale of schools. As a matter of fact, some schools have no choice but use their own funding, mainly the contribution from parent and alumni associations, to self-equip themselves with LCD projectors. However, not all of the schools afford to do so. The good benefits of LCD projectors are presentations and teaching demonstrations. As opposed, their disadvantages are high cost and depreciation after each use. Knowing their drawbacks, LCD TVs

have started to come into use. Much as LCD TVs can be used for a longer time, they are more suitable to small-scale classrooms as TV screens are not that big. In spite of their disadvantage, they are also in use due to their low costs and utilities.

There is no denying that LCD projectors and LCD TVs have been utilized because of the wide use of the Internet. Vietnam was first accustomed to the Internet in 1997, and according to the Internet World Stats (2010), 27.1% of the Vietnamese population used the Internet. However, the Internet was only officially connected to schools in the past five years through a joint project between Viettel Telecom and MOET. It is certain that the pilot project was carried out in cities first. According to Dan Tri (n.d.), after the two-year performance, 1,440 out of 1,628 schools in Nghe An Province have accessed the Internet. Up to now, more than twenty-four million people have better access to the Internet to more effectively serve their learning purposes (Internet World Stats, 2010). It is clear that the Internet is very efficient for teachers and students in remote areas. It can bring them closer to the professional world. With the utilities from the Internet, teachers are able to expand their knowledge and enrich their teaching resources. Similarly, students can themselves further study from what they have been taught in classrooms.

Mode of Teaching and Learning in Vietnam

With the assistance from teaching facilities, teachers are more proactive in their performance. A few teachers digitalize textbooks in particular subjects like literature and English. Literature teachers can avoid student getting distracted by having them read literary works on the LCD. They use PowerPoint to design lessons to impress students. It appears that most of the literary works and dialogues or conversations they design are taken from the textbooks. So, students need textbooks to have a better understanding of them before coming to class.

Additionally, some teachers of English also insert audio files under each dialogue or conversation. This is a beneficial way to teach English. For example, teachers do not have to bring cassette players to classrooms and pause for students to listen and repeat. They can do it even more effectively with the assistance of PowerPoint. In addition to e-materials, instead of handing papers or answers to their teachers, students can post them on the Moodle or send them to the teacher via e-mails. Teachers can download and mark students' papers accordingly (Ho Chi Minh City Department of Education and Training, n.d.). Moodle is widely being used in many schools as it is free. In addition, it is a tool to help users especially teachers and students get exposed to the online environment and improve their learning outcomes (University of South Australia, 2009).

It is clear that teacher role in using textbooks varies. Vietnamese teachers have their own ways of utilizing textbooks well without any change of the content determined by the MOET. Similarly, we have distinct teaching approaches for each way. First, teachers have to be orchestra leaders should they use textbooks in the traditional way. They need to know lessons inside out and the interaction is mainly between teachers and students. Teachers instruct the lessons and students jot down the information exactly based on what teachers have read. This way helps students record accurate information from their teachers. Nonetheless, students' creativity and self-study will be blocked since they will write down the information like machines. It is sure that no one can check if they understand what is written. In my opinion, teachers can make students work by having them single-handedly write down what they understand. Teachers do not need to read and have students write down. This method will evade students' ignorance of the lessons. If they fail to listen, they will have nothing in their minds. As a result, it is understandable that they do not master the lessons, either. Second, teachers have to be facilitators

should they apply ICT in their teaching. They can foster student teamwork (Gauthier, 1997). In this sense, teachers will act as advisors to direct student activities in groups or pairs. Apart from teachers' presentations, students can also take turns at presenting the lessons using PowerPoint. As such, both teachers and students work together. The interaction is not only between teachers and students but also between students and students. This way encourages students' self-study. Besides textbooks, they are also able to have access to more information from the Internet for information in order that they can enrich their presentation's content. When students work together, they will, no sooner or later, learn how to get along well (Gauthier, 1997). Each student in a group will share the knowledge with others. In this way, none of the information in textbooks is left behind.

As the Internet is commonly used now, many houses are equipped with wifi connection. It is not necessary for teachers and students to connect the Internet at schools. They can have access to the Internet at home or at the Internet cafes everywhere. It is step-by-step paving the way for e-learning in the short run in Vietnam.

Recommendations

It appears that Vietnamese educational system is gradually pacing up with regional countries. Therefore, teaching and learning performances in Vietnam are improving day after day with the assistance of teaching facilities. However, to make sure teachers and students optimize facilities, three following components need to be taken into consideration.

First, surveys and sharing sessions on the evaluation of each teaching facility used must be conducted frequently to measure teacher attitude and willingness to utilize it. Furthermore, we can also know its merits and demerits through surveys and sharing sessions inasmuch as teachers

themselves have direct interaction with each facility. They literally have a fairer sense of it than any researchers.

Second, it is strongly recommended that ICT be applied in classrooms. It is not only the developmental orientation in education in Vietnam, but it also happens to be the motto throughout the globe. As professionals, we need to envision its direction so that we can act as agents of change. In the next couple of years, more and more schools will be well-equipped with modern technologies. Internet connection or LCD projectors then are only a head-start. In a long run, Vietnamese education will turn out digital students. To adapt the social and educational demands, teachers need to be trained on techniques and skills in using new teaching facilities. Failing those techniques and skills, teachers cannot use teaching facilities economically and effectively. It will be a waste of time to equip facilities in an ineffective manner of use.

Third, teachers need to welcome new initiatives. They involve their willingness to apply new modern technologies and attitude change in their teaching concepts. Apart from teachers, students also need to change. They need to get used to new learning settings like e-learning or self-study. This challenge is momentous for both teaching and learning process.

In conclusion, teaching and learning in Vietnam are following the region. Though differences in the quality of education between different areas, the distance is getting closer because of the assistance of new learning facilities, especially the Internet. Vietnam is a developing country, so its budget for education is not as much as other countries. Thus, Vietnamese teachers need to strenuously optimize each learning facility supplied. More importantly, they need to have specific trainings on the use of each facility. It is suggested that follow-up trainings be held to ensure their effective use of the facilities. Although teaching

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facilities are necessary, teachers must never refrain themselves from creativity because they are key resources who inspire their students to study well.

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