Ho Chi Minh's Thoughts on Democracy in Education

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines Ho Chi Minh's thought on democracy in education, positioning it as a foundational component of Vietnam's human development strategy. The study focuses on several core dimensions: the principle of universal access to education, the role of the people as central agents in the socialization of education, the goal of holistic human development, and the democratic implementation of teaching and learning methods. The findings demonstrate that Ho Chi Minh's educational philosophy is not only profoundly humanistic but also functions as a guiding framework for constructing a learning society in which the people are both the objective and the driving force of development. His thought continues to provide theoretical and practical orientation for the transformation of Vietnam's education system in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Ho Chi Minh, Democracy in education, Educational philosophy, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Ho Chi Minh's lifelong aspiration was to build a society in which the people could enjoy prosperity, freedom, and happiness. As he asserted, "if a country is independent but its people do not enjoy freedom and happiness, independence has no real meaning" (Ho. CM, 2011). Central to this vision was the establishment of a new social order in which the people are not only beneficiaries but also active agents and masters of social development.

To realize such a society, Ho Chi Minh identified education as the fundamental starting point. He advocated for a democratic education system grounded in the principle that all individuals have the right to learn. This principle reflects his strategic understanding of the intrinsic relationship between education and national development. A population deprived of education, in his view, inevitably results in a weakened nation, as "an ignorant nation is a weak nation" (Ho. CM, 2011). Therefore, "everyone has access to education"is a need for individual development and also a need for societal development.

Ho Chi Minh's system of thought on education has been established by researchers as a comprehensive theoretical treasure, serving as a

guiding principle throughout the development of Vietnamese education from 1945 to the present (Dang, QB, & Truong, N. A., 2015; Nguyen, TT, & Nguyen, VT, 2025). Studies affirm that this philosophy marks a great shift from colonial-based subservient education to democratic education, where learners are no longer passive "subjects" but become the central subjects of the new society (Tran, TK, 2021; Vo, TQ, & Doan, TT, 2025). To understand this shift, many scholars have conducted in-depth research on the history of Vietnamese education over more than 1000 years and the periods influenced by the French colonial education model (VG Le, 2003; Tran, BS, 2018).

In his research on the democratic nature of education, Tran Trong Khiem (2021) emphasized the application of the motto "The people know, the people discuss, the people do, the people inspect"in the pedagogical environment to mobilize collective intelligence and unleash human creative capacity. Practicing democracy in schools requires absolute freedom of thought, encouraging students to exchange and discuss to find the truth (Tran, TK, 2021). The foundation of these viewpoints stems from the classical theoretical system of education of the Marxist-Leninist classics (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, 1976) and was creatively applied by Ho Chi Minh to Vietnamese practice (Phan, NL, & Nguyen, A., 2007).

Ho Chi Minh's wisdom is also demonstrated through his forward-thinking vision when compared with international standards. Tran Thi Minh Tuyet and Nguyen Thi Phuong Thao (2020) demonstrated the profound compatibility between the goal of "Learning to work, to be a good person, to be a good cadre, and to serve the people"and the four pillars of education of UNESCO. In particular, the goal of "Learning to serve"is considered to have a higher stature than the pillar of "Learning to live together", because it demands a spirit of responsibility and sacrifice for the benefit of the community (Tran, TMT, & Nguyen, TPT, 2020). In the structure of personality, he affirmed that "Virtue is the root", the foundation for talent to develop its value (Vu, QV, 2023). This viewpoint is consistently adhered to throughout the volumes of the *Complete Works* (Ho, CM, 2011).

In the digital age, the revolutionary spirit of the 1945 literacy campaign has been inherited and developed into the "Digital Popular Education" movement (Doan, BH, & Nguyen, TTC, 2025). Modern research focuses on the goal of "eradicating digital illiteracy", popularizing technology skills and artificial intelligence (AI) for all segments of the population (Thu, T., & Ly, N., 2025). Implementing this movement in schools helps change traditional teaching and learning methods, aiming to train "digital citizens" capable of mastering the future (Do, GQ, 2025). Finally, to achieve holistic education, scholars emphasize the need for an "educational ecosystem" with close coordination between schools, families, and society (Huynh, TBV, 2024).

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design based primarily on documentary analysis and theoretical interpretation to examine Ho Chi Minh's thought on democracy in education. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting ideological, philosophical, and educational perspectives rather than measuring quantitative data. The research materials consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included *Ho Chi Minh Complete Works* (2011 edition), speeches, letters, articles, and official writings related to education, democracy, literacy campaigns, and human development. Secondary sources included books, journal articles, academic theses, and previous studies concerning Ho Chi Minh's educational philosophy and democratic education in Vietnam. These materials were selected on the basis of their academic relevance, reliability, and direct connection to the research topic.

The study utilized document analysis, content analysis, and thematic interpretation as the principal research instruments. A thematic analytical framework was developed to categorize the data into major dimensions, including equal access to education, the role of the people in education, holistic human development, democratic teaching methods, and the contemporary significance of Ho Chi Minh's educational thought. The research procedure involved several stages: collecting and

reviewing relevant documents, classifying materials according to thematic categories, analyzing key educational concepts and arguments in Ho Chi Minh's writings, and synthesizing theoretical perspectives from previous studies. Comparative analysis was also conducted to examine the relationship between Ho Chi Minh's educational philosophy and contemporary educational concepts such as lifelong learning, educational equality, and UNESCO's framework for holistic education.

For data analysis, the study applied qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis methods to identify recurring principles, values, and ideological patterns related to democracy in education. Interpretative analysis was further employed to clarify the humanistic and democratic dimensions of Ho Chi Minh's educational thought and to evaluate its theoretical and practical significance for the development of education in contemporary Vietnam.

3. Results

3.1. Historical context and the shift towards democratic education.

3.1.1. Criticism of colonial education

For thousands of years under the feudal system, formal education in Vietnam was exclusively for men; only men were allowed to study classical literature. Although a small number of daughters of Confucian scholars, nobles, and court concubines received education, many of them being intelligent, talented, and well-versed in literature, no woman ever participated in the provincial or national examinations except for Nguyen Thi Due (during the Mac Dynasty), who disguised herself as a man to take the exam and passed, earning a doctorate. This created gender inequality, limited the talents of women in feudal society, and bound them to feudal customs and traditions.

The motivations and purposes of teaching and learning during the feudal era, alongside the positive elements that fostered a love of learning, also contained limiting factors. The main goal for most Vietnamese Confucian scholars was to pass examinations and become officials. Achieving this goal was considered the end of their studies. Few had lofty ambitions, such as studying to participate in academic debates, to govern the country, or to develop culture and reach higher levels of thought.

Throughout all the feudal dynasties of Vietnam, teaching and learning revolved around Confucian ideals, including the four principles of "self-cultivation, family management, governance, and peace", and "literature as a vehicle for morality", focusing only on "intellectual education"and "moral education" while neglecting physical and aesthetic training—conditions for the holistic development of human beings.

The teaching and learning content focus on understanding society, people, and moral cultivation, lacking knowledge of technology and production: "Knowledge and skills in producing material wealth have not become part of education" (V. G. Le, 2003). This has limited the development of production in our country, leading to Vietnam remaining a developing agricultural nation. Vietnamese Confucian scholars, with their custom of venerating sages and mechanically adopting doctrines from Chinese Confucianism with conservative thinking methods, have limited the creation of their own theories and the emergence of major schools of thought.

Meanwhile, under French rule, education underwent fundamental reforms; however, the French, in carrying out these educational reforms, aimed at "the most important goal of training a class of people to implement French policies of governance and exploitation in Vietnam and throughout the entire Indochinese peninsula. This class included officials in the administrative, educational, health, and construction sectors. In addition, it aimed to spread French ideology, gratitude for French civilization, and loyalty to France" (Tran Bich San, 2018). This resulted in over 90% of the Vietnamese population at that time being illiterate.

Born and raised in a country under French colonial rule, Ho Chi Minh witnessed and experienced the policies implemented by the French colonialists in his homeland. Therefore, from a very early age, Ho Chi Minh denounced the crimes of the French colonialists in implementing a "policy of

keeping the people ignorant" to facilitate their rule over the Vietnamese people. At the Tours Congress of the French Socialist Party (December 1920), Nguyen Ai Quoc condemned the French colonial education policy in Indochina as: "There are more prisons than schools, always open and packed with people... In Indochina, the colonialists try every way to poison us with opium and make us dull-witted with alcohol" (Ho, CM, 2011). Using his pen and sharp language to expose the true nature of the so-called "civilizing enlightenment" of the French colonialists, Ho Chi Minh clearly pointed out that, under the old regime, those who went to school were "trained to become henchmen to serve the colonialists". Those who did not attend school were poisoned by the colonialists with vices such as alcoholism, gambling, opium, and other social evils. Therefore, Ho Chi Minh actively fought against the French colonialists, demanding the right to freedom of education for the people of Indochina. In the Eight-Point Demands sent to the Versailles Conference, he demanded the right to "freedom of education, the establishment of technical and professional schools in all provinces for the indigenous people". In his famous work "The Condemnation of the French Colonial Regime" (1925), he wrote: "The people of Indochina urgently demand the opening of schools because there is a serious shortage of schools... 'Making the people ignorant to make them easier to rule' is the policy most favored by the authorities in our colonies" (Ho, CM, 2011).

3.1.2. Establishing a legal framework for revolutionary education

Having found the path to national liberation for the Vietnamese people, Ho Chi Minh also simultaneously proposed policies for the development of education in Vietnam: "1. Establish schools for workers; 2. Establish schools for the children of workers; 3. Establish places for reading books and newspapers".

As soon as the revolutionary government was established, Ho Chi Minh demanded "universal education", "raising the people's intellectual level", and even "compulsory learning of the national script". To implement education for all, immediately after reading the Declaration of Independence, at the first meeting of the Government Council on September 3, 1945, he placed the task of combating illiteracy in second place among the six urgent tasks at that time. In his capacity as President, he signed three important decrees:

Decree No. 17/SL established the Department of Popular Education, responsible for providing education for the people;

Decree No. 19/SL stipulates that within 8 months, every village and town must have a class with at least 30 students attending ;

Decree No. 20/SL mandated compulsory literacy education (free of charge) and called on all citizens to participate in the literacy campaign.

In October 1945, Ho Chi Minh issued a call to the entire nation to combat illiteracy: "To maintain independence, to make the people strong and the country rich, every Vietnamese person must understand their rights and responsibilities, must have new knowledge to participate in the national construction, and first and foremost must know how to read and write the national language " (Ho, CM, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to "strive to cleanse the remaining enslaving educational influence of colonialism, such as: indifference towards society, detachment from the working life and struggles of the people; learning for the sake of obtaining degrees, teaching through rote memorization" (Ho, CM, 2011).

3.2 The pillars of democratic education

3.2.1. The right to equal access to education

The democratic ideology in education and training is, first and foremost, the right of everyone to receive an education, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, or region. Both Vietnamese citizens at home and overseas have the right and obligation to learn. Everyone has the opportunity to learn, and to learn throughout their lives.

Ho Chi Minh advocated for the construction of a new society where education was provided for everyone. The principle of "everyone having access to education"reflects Ho Chi Minh's

strategic vision regarding the relationship between education and the Vietnamese revolution.

To provide education for all, just six days after reading *the Declaration of Independence,* at the first session of the provisional government (September 3, 1945), in his capacity as President, he signed three important decrees: Decree No. 17/SL establishing the Department of Popular Education, responsible for the people's education; Decree No. 19/SL stipulating that within eight months every village and town must have a class with at least 30 students; and Decree No. 20/SL mandating the learning of the national script (free of charge) and calling on the entire population to participate in the literacy campaign.

Broadly speaking, access to education for everyone is a goal striving for social equality. As we know, education is inherently equal; it belongs to everyone. Education only became fragmented, and the right to education was lost to workers when society became class-based and the ruling class seized control of education as a tool to dominate society and protect their own interests. Therefore, "access to education for everyone"is a need for individual development and also a need for societal development. A nation whose people lack education is an ignorant nation and also a nation without strength. Access to education is a right of every individual and a driving force for social development. "Access to education for everyone"is the theoretical basis for the formation of views on a learning society.

"Everyone has the right to education"means that people of all ages have the right to learn, to learn throughout their lives under various conditions and circumstances. The right to learn at any age, the right to learn while working, and the right to learn during retirement age all mean the right to lifelong learning. The target of education is everyone, regardless of age, gender, social class, including those with disabilities or intellectual impairments. President Ho Chi Minh cited the exemplary example of Nguyen Ngoc Ky, a boy disabled in both hands who used his feet to write but strived to become an excellent student. This reflects his profound humanistic ideology.

In the history of the Vietnamese nation, it was only during the Ho Chi Minh era that women's equality with men was truly realized, with particular attention paid to the right to education for women, especially rural women and women from ethnic minorities. According to him: "Women need to study even more; for a long time, women have been suppressed. Now is the time for them to strive to catch up with men, to be worthy of being a part of the nation" (Ho, CM, 2011). He was very concerned about women's movements, valuing the role of women when he affirmed: The Annam Revolution must have women's participation to succeed. To speak of women is to speak of half of society. If women are not liberated, then half of humanity will not be liberated. He was very concerned about women's movements: under the socialist regime, tens of thousands of women have become professional cadres in various sectors and leaders, directors and deputy directors of enterprises, chairpersons of agricultural cooperatives, chairpersons of administrative committees, secretaries of Party branches, etc. At the same time, he also encouraged women to constantly study: "To do well in the above-mentioned tasks, women must strive to study. Study culture, study politics, study professions. If you don't study, you won't progress. With determination, you will certainly be able to learn" (Ho, CM, 2011).

Ho Chi Minh also paid great attention to ethnic minorities, creating all conditions for their children, regardless of age, to attend school. He demanded that ethnic minorities be taught culture and that revolutionary ideology be propagated through this education. This was appropriate for ethnic minorities who were illiterate, had difficulty understanding and speaking Vietnamese, and generally had very low levels of awareness.

Notably, Ho Chi Minh also cared about those who had made mistakes. On November 7, 1950, President Ho Chi Minh signed Decree No. 150/SL on the organization of prisons, which included provisions for organizing educational institutions and reform schools (V26). This system of schools contributed to providing them with education in reform schools: literacy training, vocational training, and helping them awaken their

conscience, reform, and reintegrate into the community. Most of them believed in the leniency of the people's regime; many of them rose to become legitimately wealthy, owning large businesses, and many participated in maintaining security and order in their residential areas, earning the trust of the people.

Before establishing a government, Ho Chi Minh actively fought against the French colonialists, demanding the right to freedom of education for the people of Indochina. In the Eight-Point Demands sent to the Versailles Conference, he demanded the right to "freedom of education, the establishment of technical and professional schools in all provinces for the indigenous people Even after embracing Marxism-Leninism and outlining the path of the Vietnamese revolution, he did not forget the issue of education and proposed:

"1. Establish schools for workers ;

2. Establishing schools for the children and grandchildren of workers.

3. Establish places for reading books and newspapers "(Ho, CM, 2011)

When the revolutionary government was established, Ho Chi Minh demanded "universal education", "raising the people's intellectual level", and even "compulsory learning of the national script". Ho Chi Minh launched the "Eradicating Ignorance" campaign, eradicating illiteracy, and initiated the "Popular Education Movement", creating a learning society where everyone had the opportunity to receive an education.

He directed the construction and diversification of school types, attracting children from all walks of life from working-class families to study. At the same time, he expanded the forms of teaching and learning so that all citizens could receive an education. President Ho Chi Minh instructed all sectors and levels of government to create opportunities and favorable conditions for everyone to attend school and to be able to learn. The aspirations for learning of our people, suppressed for 80 years under French colonial rule, were finally realized. Under his leadership, in a short time, the new Vietnamese education system quickly transformed our nation from a place where 95% of the population was illiterate into an educated nation where everyone had the right to education.

It can be said that the idea of "Everyone has the right to education" is a noble expression of Ho Chi Minh's humanism, whose initial starting point is a vast love for humanity, especially for the poor, oppressed, and exploited. In this idea, one can still see Confucius's "education without discrimination" philosophy, and even the shadow of 18th-century Western philosophy of "equal education for all children" especially Marx's lofty humanist idea of universal education for all people (Phan, NL, & Nguyen, A., 2007).

3.2.2. The people are the subjects of education.

The pinnacle of democratic education is organizing the people to participate in and benefit from education. The idea of building a democratic, people-centered education system has been mentioned by many people at different historical periods, but it was only with Ho Chi Minh that this idea became a reality. Ho Chi Minh built an education system where all citizens have the right to participate and benefit.

Since the establishment of the revolutionary government, Ho Chi Minh developed the idea of building a mass, democratic, people's education system to a new level and implemented it very creatively in practice. From the very first days of the revolutionary government, schools and teaching facilities were extremely difficult to come by; there were no teachers, and the government lacked funding and necessary resources. However, Ho Chi Minh relied on the people to successfully launch and organize a nationwide movement to eradicate illiteracy. Where there were no schools, people's homes were used as classrooms; every house, every village, every commune utilized every available resource for learning. Without teachers, people taught each other, those who could read and write taught those who couldn't. The teachers were the people, the students were the people, teaching materials were mobilized from the people, and funding was raised through the people's contributions of wealth and labor. When developing into mass education and formal schools, he said:

"Education is a collective endeavor of the people"; therefore, all levels and sectors must organize the people's participation in the educational process by combining school education with family and social education. In his speech at the second political research course at the People's University, Ho Chi Minh explained: "In the sky, nothing is more precious than the people. In the world, nothing is stronger than the united force of the people" (Ho, CM, 2011). From this belief in the strength of the people, Ho Chi Minh believed that the cause of education and training in general must rely on the people, be closely connected with the masses to gain their trust, love, and support.

Thus, the new democratic education system, according to Ho Chi Minh's perspective, must be an education that originates from the people and returns to serve the people, ensuring that all citizens have the right to education to understand and exercise their right to be masters and rulers in the new regime.

3.2.3. The goal of education is to cultivate well-rounded individuals with the capacity to take ownership of their work.

One of Ho Chi Minh's requirements for the new education system was to cleanse the influence of the colonial, subservient education system, gradually forming a generation of Vietnamese people who possessed both virtue and talent, being both "red" (ideologically sound) and "expert" (professionally competent). To achieve this, according to Ho Chi Minh, education had to meet the demands of the revolutionary cause and had to be an education system aimed at training well-rounded Vietnamese people in the main aspects that constitute the qualities and abilities of the new man: physical strength, intellect, aesthetics, and morality. In his article "*To the Students published"* in the Nhan Dan newspaper on October 24, 1955, Ho Chi Minh viewed the holistic human being from the perspective of Virtue, Intellect, Physicality, and Aesthetics, and set forth the requirement to train, educate, and develop people according to these criteria. The author wrote: "For children, education includes: Physical education: To make the body strong and healthy, while maintaining personal and public hygiene. Intellectual education: Reviewing what has been learned and acquiring new knowledge. Aesthetic education: To distinguish what is beautiful from what is not beautiful. Moral education: To love the Fatherland, love the people, love labor, love science, and respect public property" (Ho, CM, 2011)

The author wrote about the content of education: "In education and learning, attention must be paid to all aspects: revolutionary ethics, socialist awareness, culture, technology, labor and production" (Ho, CM, 2011).

This idea was further affirmed by Ho Chi Minh in *his Report on the Draft Amendment to the Constitution* at the 11th session of the 1st National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1959). He wrote: "The State pays special attention to educating young people in moral, intellectual and physical education" (Ho, CM, 2011).

Thus, it can be said that the well-rounded human being in Ho Chi Minh's conception appears as a complete entity in which physical health, intellectual richness (old and new knowledge), profound understanding of what is good, beautiful, noble, and sublime, as well as pure and lofty moral qualities are the most fundamental and essential points.

Thus, the educational content in Ho Chi Minh's thought is extremely fundamental and comprehensive; every level and field of study must fully focus on all aspects. These are also the main activities of socialist schools in the process of training and educating people to strive to acquire the noble values and essence of the nation and humanity. This comprehensive educational content ensures that the younger generation gradually masters the treasure trove of human cultural knowledge, cultivates a solid understanding of science and technology so that they can apply it flexibly in life and work. At the same time, it contributes to educating a pure heart and noble virtues, helping people to stand firm in all challenges, so that "Wealth cannot tempt them. Poverty cannot sway them. Power cannot subdue them" (Ho, CM, 2011), wholeheartedly and diligently serving the Fatherland and the people...

Raising the intellectual level of the people to build a democratic society for the people, by the people, is the central and overarching goal of Ho Chi Minh's educational thought. Raising the intellectual level of the people is a crucial task of a democratic state. Because: "An ignorant nation is a weak nation" (Ho, CM, 2011). In the article "*Combating Illiteracy"* published in the newspaper Cuu Quoc, Ho Chi Minh clearly stated: "Now that we have gained independence, one of the tasks that must be carried out urgently at this time is to raise the intellectual level of the people" (Ho, CM, 2011).

In a democratic regime, the purpose of education is to train people who are capable of mastering and organizing a new life. In his article *"Learning tirelessly, improving continuously*", Ho Chi Minh reminded: "We are the working people who are the masters of our country" (Ho, CM, 2011). Because we are the working people who are the masters of our country, "to be good masters, we must have the capacity to be masters", and he pointed out the condition: "We study precisely to have the capacity to be masters, to have the capacity to organize a new life—first and foremost, to organize a new production system..." (Ho, CM, 2011). With such learning objectives in mind, Ho Chi Minh demanded that both teachers and students have the right, serious, and progressive attitude towards learning, with the spirit of "learning without weariness, teaching without fatigue"so that they can master themselves, "master the new life that we build. We master our future and the future of our children" (Ho, CM, 2011). Ho Chi Minh clearly stated the goal of Vietnam's new democratic education system: to train students to become useful citizens for Vietnam, generations of people with sufficient virtue and talent, both politically committed and professionally competent, so that they can effectively fulfill their roles as citizens in building and defending the socialist Fatherland. To achieve that goal, Ho Chi Minh affirmed that every Vietnamese citizen, especially the younger generation, must receive a comprehensive education: "In education and learning, attention must be paid to all aspects: revolutionary ethics, socialist awareness, culture, technology, labor and production" (Ho, CM, 2011). Therefore, acquiring the capacity for self-governance through learning is not only a right but also a duty of every citizen in the new democratic regime.

A new democratic education is one that fully develops the inherent abilities of human beings. In *his letter to students* in September 1945, President Ho Chi Minh affirmed: "Today, you are more fortunate than your fathers and brothers to receive an education from an independent country, an education that will train you to become useful citizens for Vietnam, an education that fully develops your inherent abilities" (Ho, CM, 2011). Individuals whose inherent abilities are fully developed will become well-rounded, new individuals, completely different from the education that colonialism implemented in Vietnam before.

The new democratic education that Ho Chi Minh advocated was an education aimed at training "complete" individuals to "be human", to "serve the collective, the class, and the people", and to serve "the Fatherland and humanity". According to the Marxist-Leninist classics, the goal of socialist education is to educate and train individuals for comprehensive development. Lenin clearly stated: "People will move towards training, educating, and training individuals who are fully developed, fully prepared, and capable of working. That is the goal of communism, but it must go through a long period" (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, 1976). Marx and Engels also pointed out the model of the comprehensively developed individual of future society: an individual who is developed intellectually, morally, physically, physically, and aesthetically; Harmony in physical and mental well-being, harmony between personal and social life, between the collective and the individual. Holistic personality development means developing the full potential and inherent characteristics of each individual; not making everyone completely identical or equally adept at everything. Inheriting the nation's educational traditions and absorbing the essence of human educational thought, especially the viewpoints of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh early affirmed the position and role of education in the development of the country as a whole and for each individual in particular.

A new democratic education is one that respects human dignity, cultivates character, and develops the talents of all individuals to serve the community and contribute to the common progress of humanity. Based on the reality of culture and education under French colonial rule, Ho Chi Minh exposed their policy of keeping the people ignorant to facilitate their rule. Using sharp language to reveal the true nature of the so-called "civilizing enlightenment" of the French colonialists, Ho Chi Minh clearly showed that under the old regime, those who went to school were "trained to become henchmen to serve the colonialists"; those who did not attend school were poisoned by the colonialists with vices such as alcoholism, gambling, opium, and other social evils. Therefore, it is necessary to "strive to cleanse away the remaining enslaving educational influence of colonialism, such as: indifference towards society, detachment from the working life and struggles of the people; learning for the sake of obtaining degrees, teaching through rote memorization" (Ho, CM, 2011). Not only did Ho Chi Minh condemn, criticize, and expose the true nature of colonial education, but through this, he also sought to build a new education system and a new society. For Ho Chi Minh, human beings were both the goal and the driving force of the revolution; to successfully build socialism, socialist human beings were essential. To build a new democratic regime in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh paid great attention to the strategy of cultivating human resources, with education being the most important measure.

The new education system aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals, possessing both virtue and talent. Ho Chi Minh's thought on education, as well as his conception of the role of education, is not limited to imparting knowledge and academic skills, but is comprehensive, profound, yet incredibly vibrant and practical, aiming to train well-rounded individuals who are both "red" (ideologically sound) and "expert" (professionally competent), possessing knowledge, ideals, morality, health, and aesthetics. When considering the role of education in the formation of human character, he affirmed:

"Everyone seems innocent when they're asleep. Upon waking, they can distinguish between the wicked and the virtuous.

Being kind or cruel isn't an innate trait.

It's largely due to education" (Ho, CM, 2011)

Ho Chi Minh affirmed the moral development purpose of education: "Every person has both good and evil within them. We must know how to make the good in each person blossom like spring flowers and the bad gradually disappear" (Ho, CM, 2011).

The education system that Ho Chi Minh advocated for was one that aimed to eliminate the notions of despising manual labor, valuing degrees, and chasing wealth and glory, considering "all professions to be inferior, only reading books to be superior". The new education system was one that "served the people, served the Fatherland, and trained a new generation of people and cadres" (Ho, CM, 2011).

3.3. Democracy in educational methods

3.3.1. Democracy in teaching methods

The teacher's pedagogical methods play a crucial role. Poor methods significantly reduce teaching effectiveness. Pedagogical methods encompass many aspects, but first and foremost is how to inspire students' passion for learning, their desire to strive for goodness, and their interest in exploring and discovering new and beautiful things.

The purpose of teaching methods in Ho Chi Minh's thought is to help students thoroughly understand the subject matter. After understanding, the higher goal is to develop all talents. Talent will develop when there is sufficient inner strength. The glory of teachers does not stop at imparting knowledge to students, but extends to developing and nurturing talent, and motivating the inner strength of individuals.

Having taught generations of leaders, Ho Chi Minh provided specific guidance on teaching methods as follows:

Teaching must be tailored to the needs of the educational target. It must be based on the needs of the learners throughout the educational process. Ho Chi Minh gave a very vivid example: education

is like "a person who produces goods. The goods must meet the needs of the consumers. If people need many cars but you produce many tanks, the goods will be unsold" (Ho, CM, 2011).

Ho Chi Minh clearly stated: "Training requires a thorough understanding of the learners in order to improve their abilities and eliminate their shortcomings. It must involve both training and practice. Training is teaching, practice is refining and cleaning away the evils from their minds" (Ho, CM, 2011).

In the classroom, each person's cognitive abilities are different, and the teacher must understand each individual's cognitive abilities and circumstances to find the appropriate teaching method for each student. Some students require more time and meticulous teaching to understand the subject matter. Others can be taught comprehensively while still being able to grasp the concepts (Ho, CM, 2011). Thus, Ho Chi Minh put forward the view that teaching should be tailored to the learner, not forcing them to learn according to his teaching methods. To achieve this, "lessons must be well prepared" (Bui, H., 2013), carefully and not superficially. Therefore, he considered education to be an extremely difficult and arduous task. It requires a method of organizing education that ensures a suitable match between the educational conditions and circumstances and the students being educated. The author wrote: "Workers and farmers are busy with their work; if the teaching is not suitable for the learners or their work, forcing them to attend classes with desks and chairs is ineffective. Learning must be organized according to their working circumstances to be sustainable and achieve good results" (Ho, CM, 2011).

It is necessary to promote democracy in academic activities, increase discussion and exchange to stimulate creative thinking in learners; therefore, teachers must improve and guide self-learning for learners.

Developing the inherent abilities of each individual means developing and maximizing their potential, allowing them to fully express what they have, without inhibiting their development, and thus achieving complete equality in education. A democratic education system will create conditions for them to develop their own abilities and strengths. For university education, this is even more significant, as it trains individuals with in-depth expertise in a particular field. If given the opportunity to develop their abilities and strengths, they can fully utilize their potential in their chosen field of study.

Lectures must be engaging, and theory must be linked to practice. Ho Chi Minh emphasized: "Throughout life, theory must be linked to practical work" (Ho, CM, 2011), using practice to illustrate so that learners "understand quickly and remember quickly". Learning must go hand in hand with practice, and theory must be linked to reality. Ho Chi Minh believed that: "There are two ways to train in theory:

One approach is to simply stuff their minds with dry theories. Then, teach them to write impressive programs and appeals. But when it comes to reality, propaganda, mobilization, organization, and experience, they only talk superficially. Thus, the theories are useless.

One way is that while studying theory, one must study practical work and real-world experience. After studying, they can find their own political direction, can do practical work, and can become organizers and leaders. That is practical and useful theory (Ho, CM, 2011). Combining theory with practice is a very important method, because knowing only theory without knowing how to practice is only half-knowledge. Therefore, while studying theory, you must also combine it with practice. At the same time, Uncle Ho reminded schools "not to train people who only memorize books, etc.

Ho Chi Minh believed that teaching must pay attention to the psychology of the learner, learning through play and playing through learning. Teaching is both a science and an art. The teacher should equip the learner with accurate, modern, and scientific knowledge, while also arousing their interest, desire to explore, discover, and create. All of this encompasses intellect, soul, thinking, and emotion. During the teaching process, the teacher

must use a "gentle and joyful" approach, creating interest and happiness so that the learner's ability to absorb knowledge will be faster and more effective. This is considered a way for learners to acquire knowledge easily and naturally without feeling pressured. Understanding the characteristics of human psychology, Ho Chi Minh reminded the educational forces to pay attention to the need for play and entertainment of young people. He offered his opinion on "how to teach children". That is: for young children, learning should be combined with play, "while learning, we need to make them happy, and while having fun, we need to make them learn" (Ho, CM, 2011). He also added that for young children, "be gentle and cheerful, do not force children into the mold of adults. Special attention must be paid to protecting their health" (Ho, CM, 2011). Children are not miniature adults, so we cannot arbitrarily impose on them the way of thinking, working, and behaving of adults; we must respect their natural nature and natural needs. We must help children become independent, self-aware, and disciplined, but still cheerful and lively, not timid and submissive.

For young people, "they must focus on studying and working, but they also need recreation". Healthy, well-directed recreational activities have a great educational effect. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the Vietnam People's University on January 19, 1955, Ho Chi Minh instructed: "Healthy recreation is a part of the life of young people... There is education in recreation. There should be cultural and physical recreation that is collective and mass-oriented" (Ho, CM, 2011). Ho Chi Minh advised teachers and organizations to pay attention to the relationship between recreation and learning. While studying, students should be made happy, and while playing, they should also be encouraged to study diligently.

The viewpoint that "it is best to avoid rote learning and to avoid using too many foreign languages in teaching. Foreign languages should not be used in our own languages" (Ho, CM, 2011) is a key element. Thus, the method of the new democratic education system is to eliminate rote learning and formalistic teaching and learning, focusing on practical learning, with professional and vocational training occupying a significant position, and highly valuing the scientific spirit to help students develop scientific understanding, critical thinking, analytical and synthetic skills, creativity, and practical thinking.

A competitive emulation movement must be launched in teaching and learning. When good teaching becomes a mass movement, teaching staff will have the opportunity to cooperate, learn, and exchange experiences in academics and teaching. However, competition should be for mutual progress, not to achieve high rankings at all costs, or to avoid jealousy and envy when high rankings are not achieved. Under the guidance of President Ho Chi Minh, the education sector launched the "two good" emulation movement (good teaching, good learning). The "two good" movement has developed both in breadth and depth, and many exemplary models in teaching and learning have emerged, contributing to the development of the education sector.

According to Ho Chi Minh, it is necessary to emphasize the method of setting an example in teaching to achieve high effectiveness in education. The role models for students to learn from are the teachers. According to him, teachers in any era are respected and honored by society because they always symbolize the most exemplary aspects of life and morality, serving as "golden standards" for students to follow. Ho Chi Minh often reminded: Teachers must become shining examples, role models for students to emulate, "they must be role models in all aspects: thought, morality, and work style" (Ho, CM, 2011). Teachers are like mirrors for students to look up to and emulate, first and foremost in their morality and character. The younger the students, the more they tend to imitate their teachers' behaviors and gestures in daily life; therefore, teachers must have truly exemplary behavior and conduct. The ethics and lifestyle of teachers, and the pedagogical relationships within the school, will create an educational environment where the moral character and emotions of student mature day by day, hour by hour. Ho Chi Minh said: "The minds of young people are as pure as a white silk cloth. If dyed blue, it will be blue; if dyed red, it will be red. Therefore, learning in school has a great

influence on the future of young people, that is, the future of the country" (Ho, CM, 2011). The example set by teachers for students is extremely important, "good teachers have a good influence, bad teachers have a bad influence" (Ho, CM, 2011).

"Teachers and students should honestly unite and use democratic methods (honest self-criticism and criticism) to help each other progress" (Ho, CM, 2011) is a measure to effectively implement democratic relationships in teaching and learning according to Ho Chi Minh's thought. From affirming that "Not criticizing means losing one's democratic right" (Ho, CM, 2011), Ho Chi Minh repeatedly reminded teachers and students to use self-criticism and criticism to continuously progress together, unite closely, and serve the Fatherland and the people. Through self-criticism and criticism, a new unity is achieved: "We must unite to help each other learn, boldly criticize and honestly self-criticize, and when criticizing and self-criticizing, it must stem from the desire for unity, in order to achieve a new unity on a new basis" (Ho, CM, 2011).

Thus, democracy in teaching methods is a synthesis of the methods that teachers employ to help students acquire knowledge in the most active and comprehensive way, and to maximize the potential of each student.

3.3.2. Democracy in the learning method

Ho Chi Minh's perspective on democracy in learning helps learners relate to themselves, compare it with their own learning motivations, and choose and use the most beneficial specific learning methods for themselves. Above all, it encourages them to constantly cultivate a strong will to strive and continuously improve in their studies, aiming for personal progress, for the benefit of the people and the nation. By doing so, they will certainly achieve the purpose of learning.

With the right motivation for learning, students will voluntarily and consciously engage in their studies, avoiding coercion and pressure. They will automatically complete their study plans, demonstrating diligence and perseverance, and will not back down from any difficulties in their learning. With a spirit of voluntary learning, students will proactively seek and discover knowledge with passion and enthusiasm. Ho Chi Minh believed that learning only yields good results when students clearly define their learning goals and cultivate the right motivation. He first mentioned defining learning goals: "One must know how to learn voluntarily. To do so, one must understand several things: What is the purpose of learning?... Learning to correct one's thinking... Learning to cultivate revolutionary ethics... Learning to believe... Learning to act" (Ho, CM, 2011). At the Second Congress of Vietnamese Students on May 7, 1958, Uncle Ho emphasized: "For intellectual youth like you here, two questions need to be asked: What are you studying for? Who are you studying to serve? These are two questions that must be answered decisively in order to have direction" (Ho, CM, 2011). He clearly stated: "Under the colonial and feudal regimes, the purpose of going to school was simply to get a diploma to become a high-ranking official, earn a high salary, eat well, and dress well. That's all. They knew nothing about the fate of the nation, how the world was changing. The purpose of education was to enslave and serve them. Today we have achieved independence and freedom, and the youth are truly the future masters of the country. To be worthy of this role, they must study. Studying now is different from studying under the colonial and feudal regimes" (Ho, CM, 2011), "Study to improve political, cultural, scientific, technical, and military skills". According to him, learning is not for fame or adornment, but "to work, to be a good person", to serve the collective, the class and the people, the Fatherland and humanity" (Ho, CM, 2011). Therefore, as long as we live, we must learn, learn to progress continuously, to keep up with the trends of the times. Ho Chi Minh clearly pointed out the necessity of learning, that learning is endless because "stopping is falling behind, becoming backward, and eliminating oneself first" (Ho, CM, 2011).

In the context of learning, the democratization of education requires achieving the goal: "...learning is about having the capacity to be self-reliant, to have the capacity to organize a new life... Therefore, the awareness of self-reliance is not only manifested in a passionate spirit of learning to continuously improve one's capacity for self-

reliance" (Ho, CM, 2011). Thus, the implementation of democratization in education aims to make learners aware of their right to self-reliance, and through that, to demonstrate their right to self-reliance in practice, because they are the masters of the country. To achieve this requires continuous effort and the enhancement of their capacity for self-reliance in learning.

Ho Chi Minh emphasized that students must have the right attitude towards learning. Only then will their studies be fruitful. In his "Opening Speech at the First Theoretical Course at the Nguyen Ai Quoc School" on September 7, 1957, he clearly stated: "...it is necessary to have the right attitude towards learning:

- Be humble and honest... Arrogance, conceit, and complacency are the number one enemies of learning.

- We must uphold the spirit of independent thinking and freedom of thought.

When reading material, one must think deeply and not blindly believe every word in the book. If there are any unclear points, one should boldly raise them and discuss them until they are fully understood. For any issue, one must carefully consider whether it aligns with reality and is truly accurate. Absolutely do not blindly follow textbooks without careful consideration; one must think things through thoroughly.

We must defend the truth..., without wavering in our thinking.

"We must unite and help each other in our studies..." (Ho, CM, 2011).

Along with clearly stating the purpose of learning, what should learners study and what attitude should they adopt to make it worthwhile? President Ho Chi Minh clearly pointed out the way to achieve effective learning: "To achieve effective learning, one must have the right attitude and the right method... The motto and method of learning is to connect theory with practice, learning must go hand in hand with doing, not just learning for the sake of talking..." (Ho, CM, 2011).

One of the key elements contributing to the value of Ho Chi Minh's thought on democracy in education is the importance of self-study. To fully develop each individual's inherent abilities and creativity, self-study and research are crucial. Throughout his life, Ho Chi Minh did not have much time to sit in school like other students, but thanks to his exceptional self-learning ability, he absorbed the cultural essence of the nation and humanity, the most advanced knowledge of the era, enriching his own knowledge base and becoming an outstanding cultural figure. In his work "*Correcting Working Methods" (*1947), when discussing cadre training, he wrote: "Self-study is the core. Discussion and guidance assist" (Ho, CM, 2011). Later, he further emphasized: "Self-study must be improved and guided" (Ho, CM, 2011).

Learning is always about self-study. No one can learn for you. President Ho Chi Minh always criticized passive learning, laziness, and reliance on teachers and schools. He advised: "It's not about learning when there's a teacher, and playing around when the teacher isn't around" (Ho, CM, 2011). You must find books to read, take books as your teacher, and "know how to learn independently". If learning is the process of transforming scientific knowledge accumulated over generations into your own knowledge, then self-study is the most fundamental element that makes this accumulation process the fastest and most effective. Self-study is the planned effort of the learner, based on high voluntariness and self-awareness, requiring a supportive environment and guidance. To succeed in self-study, you need to organize your study time scientifically, persevere in implementing your plan, and not give up in the face of difficulties and obstacles. The wealth of human knowledge is boundless; learners must know how to select appropriate content, avoid trying to learn too much, and have a reasonable schedule to prevent overlaps.

The primary and minimum goal that learners must achieve is understanding. The essence of democracy in learning is enthusiasm and thoroughness. To achieve this, learners must understand the learning content. The process of self-questioning, self-answering, and self-assessment is a process of discovering what is

unclear or incomprehensible and finding ways to resolve those doubts. President Ho Chi Minh always reminded learners to ask "why", and to think carefully about whether their answers are consistent with reality. This process helps learners cultivate their thinking skills, improve their ability to research and answer questions, and better grasp the necessary content that needs to be applied. Here, learning must go hand in hand with questioning to achieve understanding; things that are not understood or cannot be answered should be continued through further study. When learning, one should not simply absorb information passively. In class, one shouldn't consider everything the teacher says as absolute truth, nor should the initial knowledge read be accurate. Instead, one must examine the issue from multiple perspectives, formulating questions and finding reasonable answers to gain a deeper understanding and ultimately develop the ability to act and solve problems.

President Ho Chi Minh always reminded people to cultivate their knowledge through various forms of learning, learning anytime, anywhere, and throughout their lives. Answering the question, "Where should one learn?", President Ho Chi Minh stated that one should learn in school, from books, and from the people; not learning from the people is a great shortcoming.

Learners need to have a humble attitude of learning from the masses, learning from those around them, learning from the good aspects and valuable experiences of others. Ho Chi Minh's experience showed that he not only knew how to thoroughly utilize existing organizations and activities in society such as libraries, clubs, books, newspapers, lectures, seminars, and museums, but also created new, vibrant, and beneficial forms of learning himself, such as: taking advantage of guidance and assistance from others, learning while communicating, learning in mass mobilization work, etc., emphasizing the combination of learning and practice in the self-study process.

Students must have ambition and unwavering revolutionary will to constantly strive for excellence in their studies and training. Ho Chi Minh not only emphasized the necessity of learning, its motivation, attitude, and methods, but also consistently demanded that students possess ambition and unwavering revolutionary will to continuously improve in their studies and training, overcoming all difficulties and challenges. "...they must have the will to be self-reliant, self-sufficient, and independent... They must be determined to see things through to the end, to achieve success, and must have a thirst for progress and learning, learning constantly and endlessly. They must learn culture, politics, and their profession" (Ho, CM, 2011).

4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Ho Chi Minh's thought on democracy in education represents a comprehensive and profoundly humanistic educational philosophy closely associated with the process of national liberation, social development, and human emancipation in Vietnam. His educational thought emphasizes that education is not merely a means of transmitting knowledge but also a fundamental condition for empowering the people, developing human capacities, and building a democratic society. The principle of universal access to education reflects Ho Chi Minh's belief that education is a basic right of all individuals regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, or social background. This viewpoint marked a significant transformation from the elitist and colonial educational systems that had previously restricted educational opportunities for the majority of the population.

The study also indicates that Ho Chi Minh considered the people to be both the subjects and beneficiaries of education. This perspective corresponds closely with contemporary theories of democratic and learner-centered education, which emphasize participation, equality, and collective responsibility in the educational process. His idea that "education is the undertaking of the masses" highlights the importance of mobilizing social participation in educational development and strengthening the relationship between schools, families, and society. Thus, according to Ho Chi Minh, an education of the people, by the people, and for the people must be appropriate to the practical conditions of the country while gradually

keeping pace with the global education system. Ho Chi Minh paid attention to all levels of education, including higher education, with the aim of creating a democratic and healthy educational environment in which teachers, educational staff, and learners could fully develop their capacities. His ideas on democracy in education remain highly relevant today, particularly in the context in which scholars have identified the four pillars of twenty-first-century education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that the goal of education in Ho Chi Minh's thought extends beyond intellectual training to encompass the holistic development of human beings in terms of morality, intellect, physical health, aesthetics, and social responsibility. This educational orientation shares important similarities with UNESCO's concept of holistic education and modern human development theories. However, Ho Chi Minh's thought also possesses distinctive characteristics rooted in Vietnamese historical and revolutionary conditions, particularly the emphasis on serving the people and contributing to national development. Ho Chi Minh played a central role in establishing a new education system in Vietnam: a progressive, national, democratic, and inclusive education system in which everyone has the right to learn, to pursue lifelong learning, and to study not only for personal advancement but also for the progress of society and the development of the nation.

In the digital era, the application of Ho Chi Minh's democratic ideology in education has entered a phase of creative development through the "Digital Mass Education" movement. This initiative seeks to actualize the right to equitable access to knowledge and popularize technological competencies for the entire population. Democratization in contemporary education extends beyond traditional literacy to prioritize digital literacy, ensuring that no one is left behind by equipping all social groups with the skills necessary to use the Internet and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to master their own lives. Within the school environment, the democratic spirit is reinforced through the transformation of teacher–student relationships, in which educators shift from an impositional transmission mindset to the role of facilitators of learners' competencies. This encourages students to exercise freedom of thought, scientific debate, and critical thinking in order to discover truth rather than passively receive knowledge. Furthermore, the implementation of the motto "The people know, the people discuss, the people do, and the people supervise" through transparent digital governance platforms has helped mobilize collective intellectual potential while fostering an educational ecosystem that closely integrates schools, families, and society. Applying Ho Chi Minh's educational philosophy to cyberspace also requires education to maintain "ethics as the foundation," cultivating political steadfastness and civilized digital behavior among learners so that technology ultimately serves the nation and its people.

From a practical perspective, the study suggests that Ho Chi Minh's thought on democracy in education continues to provide valuable theoretical and policy implications for educational reform in Vietnam today. His emphasis on educational equality, democratic teaching methods, and the development of human capacities may contribute to addressing current challenges such as educational inequality, passive learning methods, and the demands of digital transformation in education. The promotion of learner autonomy, critical thinking, and social responsibility has become increasingly important in the context of globalization and the knowledge-based economy.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. First, the research relies primarily on documentary analysis and theoretical interpretation; therefore, it does not include empirical investigation or field-based evidence regarding the practical implementation of democratic education in contemporary Vietnam. Second, the study mainly focuses on Ho Chi Minh's educational thought within the Vietnamese context and does not provide extensive comparative analysis with other international educational philosophies. Future research could expand the scope by employing empirical methods, conducting comparative studies, or examining the application of Ho Chi Minh's educational philosophy in modern educational institutions and digital learning environments.

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