

The philosophical foundations of Nguyen Truong To's educational reform and its implications for contemporary higher education in Vietnam

Tu Duy Do – Phuong Thi Hong Nguyen

DOI: 10.18355/XL.2024.17.03.05

Abstract

Our essay examines the philosophical underpinnings of the educational reform strategy of Nguyen Truong To (1828-1871), a key actor in the late 19th-century national reform movement in Vietnam. His recommendations, which were distinguished by their methodical and thorough approach, covered a wide range of societal topics, including politics, economics, culture, military affairs, and, most significantly, education. The idea of "authentic learning," which emphasizes the integration of practical knowledge with goals for national growth and sovereignty preservation, was central to his reform plan. In light of Vietnam's historical development, this paper reexamines Nguyen Truong To's educational philosophy, emphasizing both its ongoing relevance and fresh viewpoints on innovative educational practices. In this study, the fundamental ideas of his "authentic learning" philosophy are reexamined and interpreted, along with its possible benefits and points of reference clarified. We also analyze their potential for the evolution of higher education in modern Vietnam.

Key words: Educational Innovations in Vietnam, Nguyen Truong To's Educational Philosophy, Philosophical Foundations of Educational Reform, Pragmatism in Vietnamese Higher Education

Introduction

Nguyen Truong To (1828-1871), a notable pioneer in the field of educational reform in Vietnam during the late 19th century, played a crucial role in lobbying for a thorough restructuring of the country's educational system. To was born in Nghe An province to a Catholic family. His exposure to Western education, especially during his trips to Paris, had a great impact on his reformist ideas. His rigorous exploration of diverse disciplines, including science, technology, and political theory, led to a passionate commitment to revolutionize education in order to strengthen Vietnam's intellectual prowess and independence. After coming back to Vietnam, To's disappointment with the current educational paradigms motivated him to suggest substantial revisions. The author's influential publications, "On Practical Learning" (1866) and "Eight Things That Need to Be Done Urgently" (1867), succinctly conveyed his vision for a practical educational system that prioritized the application of practical knowledge within Vietnam's socio-political environment. Le Thi Huong (2012: 50) recognizes To's progressive position on education, emphasizing its comprehensive scope in comparison to his peers.

In our research, we analyze Nguyen Truong To's theory of 'genuine learning' and its ongoing significance in the advancement and enhancement of higher education in Vietnam. Through a critical analysis of To's educational proposals, our objective is to extract relevant observations that might contribute to ongoing educational reform initiatives. This will help ensure that the education system is in line with current socio-economic requirements and global benchmarks. The main argument of our research proposes that Nguyen Truong To's genuine learning ideology provides a fundamental framework for revitalizing Vietnam's higher education scene. We contend that the concepts of practicality, relevance, and creativity inherent in To's philosophy may adeptly tackle the issues confronting contemporary educational

institutions in Vietnam. The objective is to thoroughly examine To's educational philosophy, evaluate its relevance to present-day difficulties, and suggest a series of recommendations for incorporating essential elements of his ideology into ongoing reform efforts. Our goal is to contribute to the continuing discussion on educational reform in Vietnam by providing a perspective that is based on historical knowledge and emphasizes the need to be adaptable, have practical knowledge, and develop intellectual independence. The technique used in this article is a qualitative examination of Nguyen Truong To's publications, together with a review of current literature on educational reform in Vietnam. Additionally, comparative studies are conducted with other educational reform movements.

Literature Review

Nguyen Truong To's contributions to educational philosophy, namely his support for "authentic learning," have garnered significant scholarly interest in academic circles. Notable contributions in this field include Le Thi Huong's examination in the "Vietnam Social Sciences Magazine" (published in May 2012), where she carefully examines various parts of To's ideology, such as the goals of education, the criticism of memorization-based learning, and the demand for a restructured educational curriculum. Huong's analysis provides a clear understanding of To's forward-thinking approach to education, highlighting the importance of practical and applicable knowledge in the learning process (Le Thi Huong, 2012: 49-53). In their article published in the "Education Magazine" (July 2019), Chu Thi Diep and Nguyen Thi Thuy Linh (2019: 8-10) extensively examine the socio-political environment of 19th-century Vietnam and To's transformative aspirations. Their work highlights the lasting significance of To's ideas in current educational reform initiatives in Vietnam, demonstrating the flexibility of his ideology (or philosophical assumptions) in addressing new issues.

Nguyen Thi Nguyet's 2017 thesis (Nguyen, 2017) offers a thorough analysis of the fundamental elements of To's educational philosophy, emphasizing its importance for Vietnam's present educational environment. This academic investigation highlights the significance of To's ideas in enhancing and directing the development of educational methods in Vietnam. The article "Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nguyen Truong To - Nguyen Tien Luc's Educational Reform Ideology" by Nguyen Tien Luc (Nguyen, 2013) provides a comparative analysis of the educational philosophies of To and Yukichi. The book uncovers shared characteristics in their reception of Western education and their critiques of shallow learning and erroneous learning. Examining To's ideology from a comparative standpoint enhances our comprehension of it within the wider framework of worldwide educational reform movements. Furthermore, it emphasizes his suggestion of an "authentic philosophy of learning (learning ideology)."

Additional research on Nguyen Truong To's educational innovations and philosophical ideas can be found in the writings of Vuong Dinh Chu, Duong Ngoc Dung, Nguyen Dinh Chu, Pham Huy Thong, and Vu Gia. Vuong Dinh Chu thoroughly analyzes "Nguyen Truong To's Reform Proposals," providing a meticulous exploration of To's extensive strategies for revitalizing the nation through education (Vuong, 2014: 19-90). "Nguyen Truong To in the Cognitive Black Hole of the Late 19th Century" by Duong Ngoc Dung (Duong, 2014: 91-95) examines the intellectual difficulties and societal circumstances that influenced To's program for reform. Nguyen Dinh Chu's piece, "Nguyen Truong To - The Rise of Individual Thinking," (Nguyen, 2014: 125-146) focuses on To's role in promoting a shift towards a more independent and analytical attitude to education and academic pursuits in Vietnam. In "Nguyen Truong To - Patriotic Catholics and Great Philosophers in Vietnam in the 19th Century," Pham Huy Thong (Pham, 2014: 147-162) places To within the wider

framework of Vietnamese intellectual history, highlighting his function as a mediator between traditional ideals and modernist ambitions. Vu Gia's work, titled "Tu Luc Van Doan and Some Innovative Ideas of Nguyen Truong To," (Vu, 2014: 179-200) and the four previous titles can be found in the book "Nguyen Truong To's Book Yesterday and Today," released by Tri Thuc Publishing House in 2014 (Nguyen, Vuong, & Duong, 2014). This contribution effectively captures the lasting significance of To's ideas. This compilation is a tribute to the enduring influence and impact of To's legacy. However, it goes beyond that by emphasizing the liveliness of his views in the current discussion on education and the progress of the nation. Although there is already a considerable amount of research on Nguyen Truong To, a thorough examination that combines To's practical ideology (learning philosophy) with the specific requirements and dynamics of Vietnam's higher education system is still difficult to find. This research seeks to connect the divide by elucidating the suitability of To's "authentic learning" theory in the present Vietnamese higher education system. We aim to provide a comprehensive account of its capacity to stimulate systemic educational innovation and reform.

Basic contents of Nguyen Truong To's authentic ideology

Criticism of Confucian education (criticism of false learning)

Vietnamese education has been influenced by Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism. For than two millennia, Confucianism has shaped the nation's education and economy. This was notably true under the Later Le Dynasty (1428-1527) and the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1883). Confucianism greatly affected morality and ethics at this time. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, it established a rigorous examination system that fostered a literary and ethical intellectual elite. This reinforced Confucian morality and social equilibrium and strengthened the social framework. Confucian education promoted morality, ethics, and social order, shaping Vietnam's intellectual and bureaucratic elite. This educational style dominated until the early 20th century, fostering academic excellence and morality.

Despite its virtues, Confucian education has problems, particularly in its contempt for empirical science and technological advancement. This neglect slowed scientific research in Vietnam, reducing the country's ability to innovate and adapt to global changes. The educational system's rigorous adherence to Confucian thought fostered intellectual conformity and rejection of new ideas, stifling critical thinking and innovation. The Confucian educational system's inadequacies became apparent in the 19th century. Its prescriptiveness and dogmatism failed to create the intellectual energy needed to face modernity. This acknowledgment highlighted the urgent need for school reform, paving the door for innovative thinkers like Nguyen Truong To, who sought to balance traditional values with modern culture.

The 1858 French invasion of Vietnam marked the beginning of Western culture and scientific and industrial advancement. The late 19th-century Vietnamese sociopolitical landscape was greatly influenced by this connection. Mandarin education, rooted in Confucianism, faced a crucial moment. The organization struggled to keep up with rapidly changing domestic and global conditions. According to Nguyen Truong To, their lack of expertise in astronomy and mathematics, which are essential for understanding nature and meeting public demands, showed their schooling shortcomings. "Given our poor understanding of astronomy and mathematics, how can we understand the skies and quickly help the people? Through personal experience, I have learned that our intellectual prowess is limited, and literature cannot withstand difficult circumstances" (Tra & Dang, 1990: 271).

In the midst of turbulence and self-reflection, a handful of dedicated Confucian scholars, faced with the urgent need to revitalize their nation, began to propose fundamental changes. They wanted to overcome feudal practices by expressing their political views to modernize, maintain the nation's independence, and lead it to long-

term progress. Nguyen Truong To was a notable reformist academic. Their scope, practicality, and longevity made the plans stand out. To's advocacy went beyond talking ideas and included tangible steps to restore the nation, focusing on education. For this revolutionary aim, he promoted "authentic learning." To imagine an education system that adapts to contemporary requirements and strengthens the country's defenses, and creates a resilient and competent populace.

Nguyen Truong To's objection to "false learning," changed Vietnam's educational reform debate. His initial criticism focused on his distaste for the current curriculum. The curriculum does not connect students to their country's history and practical reality, he says. Focusing too much on ancient Chinese works and historical figures detracts from local history, culture, and practical knowledge, which are essential for national progress. Nguyen Truong To questioned to what extent idolizing ancient personalities like Xiao Ha and Han Xin detracts from studying modern concerns. He asked, "Do we still owe them money today? Do people nowadays struggle to match their forefathers' achievements? Would you rather revive them? How strange, inexplicable?" (Truong, 1988: 249). Nguyen Truong To stresses the importance of critical thinking and advises reassessing the curriculum to include issues relevant to Vietnam's current and future needs. We respect this approach because it promotes an educational makeover that stresses information and skills that directly benefit the nation and its residents. The focus shifted from memorizing old materials to participatory, pragmatic, and relevant instruction.

In addition, Nguyen Truong To's critique went beyond solely focusing on the curriculum and instead addressed the wider scope of education within the Confucian system. He noticed that the dominant educational philosophy placed a greater emphasis on moral and political instruction while neglecting practical disciplines such as economics and science. According to To, this imbalance led to a disconnection from practical use and impeded the holistic development of pupils' talents. He argued for a substantial departure from the conventional emphasis on literature and historical veneration since he considered it kept students stuck in outdated stories and diverted their attention from gaining practical knowledge. He contended that "the decline of Eastern countries can be attributed to their fondness for trivial literature, their tendency to employ flattery to get easily obtainable wealth, and their lack of awareness regarding how Western societies have benefited from the surplus of knowledge and resources that the East possessed in the past" (Truong, 1988: 248). To's statement demonstrates his conviction regarding the imperative of embracing a utilitarian approach to education, which prioritizes practicality over simply theoretical or historical aspects.

Agreeing with To's viewpoint, Le Si Thang (1997), a researcher, emphasized To's groundbreaking role in questioning the rigid devotion to Confucian values. Le stated that "Nguyen Truong To was the first person in Vietnamese history to establish the theoretical basis for opposing dogmatism, conservatism, nepotism, frivolous literature, and the negative aspects of Confucianism. This contribution is significant in the history of Vietnamese thought" (Le, 1997: 371). This recognition highlights To's significant role in shaping educational ideology in Vietnam, positioning him as a trailblazer in the quest for a more equitable and pragmatic educational framework.

Furthermore, Nguyen Truong To's critique focused on the pedagogical approaches commonly used in Vietnamese education, specifically criticizing the repetitive and rigid procedures that characterized the process of teaching and learning. He remarked, "Individuals of all ages, attending both public and private schools, engage in a competitive pursuit to discover the most exceptional sentences, each person striving to create their own ingenious sentence. How can this be considered unfavorable?!" (Truong, 1988: 250). This complaint underscored the prioritization of rote memory and the mere repetition of facts, rather than nurturing the development of critical

thinking and comprehension. Nguyen Truong highlighted the fragmented structure of the educational experience, pointing out the absence of coherence and applicability in the courses covered from childhood to adulthood. He stated,

“when I was young, I studied literature, vocabulary, poetry, and wealth. When I grew up, I studied law, history, and military discipline. When I was young, I studied Shandong and Shanxi, which I had never seen before. When I grew up and worked, I went to Cochinchina and Tonkin. When I was young, I studied astronomy, geography, politics, and customs in China, but when I grew up, I used geography, astronomy, politics, and customs of the South, etc. There are countless similar things like this. So, wearing out a pen and drying out your lips doesn't count” (Truong, 1988: 249).

This critique highlights the gap between the curriculum and the practical requirements of society, as well as the lack of development of flexible and creative thinkers who can effectively navigate the challenges of their day. To's observations encompassed a comparative investigation of educational procedures in nations such as Japan and Korea. Despite the influence of Chinese literature, education in these countries was more focused on addressing the country's current requirements and realities in a pragmatic manner. He appreciated the ability of these nations to assimilate external influences while prioritizing practical and useful knowledge, resulting in their progress. Nguyen Truong To felt the urge to ask why people in Vietnam do not do the same. He posed this rhetorical question to emphasize his support for an educational system in Vietnam that is more adaptable and relevant, capable of balancing traditional values with the needs of modernity and advancement.

Furthermore, Nguyen Truong To analyzed and clarified the fundamental difficulties inside the Confucian educational system, including its reluctance to accept and integrate new information. To discovered a significant obstacle, which was the dependence on the Nho script, known to be obscure for the average Vietnamese learner. Furthermore, it required a significant amount of repetitive memorization. The emphasis on memory specifically hindered the development of crucial parts of learning, such as comprehension, practical application, and the investigation of novel concepts. Consequently, the educational system's ability to adopt and spread new knowledge was restricted. To's critique emphasized a wider demand for reform, asking for a transition away from the deeply rooted Confucian beliefs that held sway over Vietnamese education. He conceived of an educational model that was inclusive, flexible, and responsive to the enormous breadth of human knowledge, thereby better aligning with the requirements and ambitions of modern society. Furthermore, To contended that continuing to adhere to an obsolete educational framework would impede the advancement of the nation and even lead to its deterioration. He stressed the necessity of a comprehensive transformation of the education system, including its objectives, substance, syllabus, and approaches, in order to create a favorable atmosphere for creativity, analytical thinking, and the well-rounded growth of students.

The goal of education

Nguyen Truong To recognized the importance of setting defined educational goals in order to develop a country's talent. To conducted a thorough evaluation of the educational philosophy of the Nguyen Dynasty and found the stagnation that was inherent in the conventional Confucian methods. He suggested that true advancement relies on reframing educational objectives, promoting a transition towards pragmatism and relevance. He concisely expressed, “acquire knowledge in areas where you lack understanding and apply it in practical situations. The purpose is to engage in

activities that are useful in the near future and also have advantages for the next life” (Truong, 1988: 277). To's vision for education was clearly shaped by his acknowledgment of Western progress, which prompted a move away from the prevailing nihilistic mindset of the era. He advocated for a "Practical" education, emphasizing the importance of learning that is immediately applicable to current concerns and focused on solving real-world problems. This viewpoint was summarized by his statement, “In the absence of a knowledgeable educational foundation, traditions will progressively deteriorate, and individuals' moral values will progressively become deceitful, superficial, and vacant” (Truong, 1988: 125).

To advocated for a shift in educational focus towards innovation and practical knowledge through his appeals to the Nguyen Dynasty, namely in his works "Eight things that need to be done urgently" (published in 1866 and 1867). He employed the metaphor of warfare evolution to emphasize the imperative for educational systems to progress alongside technological and societal advancements. “In the past, combat involved the use of bows and arrows, whereas today, cannons are required to effectively engage with the enemy” (Truong 1988: 390). To's support for a practical educational system emphasized the urgent need for immediate change. He has shown wisdom and humility by actively adopting valuable foreign information to promote the progress of the nation and secure the welfare of future generations.

Developing intellectual excellence and fostering a highly skilled workforce are crucial pursuits in the field of education. They are the foundation for the progress of a country and the defense of its independence. Nguyen Truong The claim is made that a nation's path toward success or failure is closely tied to its dedication to fostering the intellectual and skill development of its population. To articulate a vision for an educational paradigm that goes beyond simply transmitting historical knowledge and reciting old texts in a rigid manner. To's educational philosophy places great importance on creating an environment that emphasizes the empirical study of natural sciences and the practical application of knowledge. This method promotes a pedagogical transition towards a curriculum that is based on the investigation of the natural world and the real-life problems that society faces. The core of this educational philosophy is its deviation from the conventional respect for outdated beliefs, instead focusing on a curriculum that is adaptable to the changing and evolving requirements of the modern world. Furthermore, the goal is to create an educational system that incorporates vocational training and experiential learning to develop highly skilled professionals and intellectuals. This paradigm emphasizes the significance of incorporating hands-on activities and real-life scenarios into the educational process. The belief is that students would be equipped with the required competencies and insights to contribute effectively to the challenges of modern society.

Content that is useful and may be applied in real-life situations

Nguyen Truong To developed an educational framework that was both original and expansive, taking into account the historical circumstances of his nation and having a forward-looking vision. This framework was based on the idea that education should not only pass on knowledge but also actively involve itself in the process of creation, reflecting the practicality inherent in the natural world. To believed that “it is necessary to genuinely acquire the skill of implementing creative acts as a means of practical education, since creation serves as the ultimate instructor for all individuals. All actions in creation are pragmatic, implying the acquisition of knowledge from oneself, from all entities, and from the aptitude for learning” (Truong, 1988: 191).

Nguyen Truong To further clarified this approach by drawing parallels between the creative processes observed in nature and human innovation. As Truong (1988: 193) explains, “learning talent involves imitating the ways of creation. For example,

ancient people observed flowers spinning and imitated this motion to create cars. They also observed the shape of the crescent moon and imitated it to make bows. Additionally, they took inspiration from the shapes of objects to develop writing systems, listened to the music created by the wind, and considered the terrain when constructing houses.”

To's conviction in a symbiotic relationship between learning and the creative impulses found in nature is highlighted by his reflections. To advocates for an educational paradigm that promotes practical skills and innovation, which are essential for the nation's progress and the improvement of human existence. When examining To's work, it becomes evident that his contributions are both forward-thinking and remarkably insightful. He advocates for a type of education that aligns with the natural world and its limitless potential for inspiration and innovation.

Nguyen Truong To proposed a substantial expansion of the educational curriculum to remedy the shortcomings of Confucian education, which mostly focused on moral and political training at the expense of practical knowledge. He suggested the creation of certain departments, such as Agriculture, Astronomy, Geography, Technology, Law, and Foreign Languages, with the goal of cultivating a skilled workforce knowledgeable in several subjects crucial for the comprehensive advancement of the nation. He regarded the Faculty of Agriculture as indispensable for educating agricultural specialists who would then distribute crucial agricultural knowledge among the general public. Consequently, this would improve productivity and stimulate economic growth. The establishment of specialized departments for Astronomy and Geography aimed to foster a scientific comprehension of the universe and the Earth, enhancing the societal perspective with empirical information. The establishment of the Faculty of Technology was to efficiently exploit and enhance the usage of the country's resources. On the other hand, the Faculty of Law was created to guarantee a knowledgeable population that upholds legal norms across all levels of society, including the monarchy.

As previously mentioned, To's educational plan was based on the idea of combining theoretical knowledge with practical application, with a particular focus on the importance of natural sciences in expanding human intellectual horizons. The individual firmly believed that “science has the power to enlighten others about the significant misconceptions that have been inherited from ancient times, and can enable them to comprehend that there is nothing inexplicable about all that exists on Earth” (Le, 2012: 52-53). To's belief in the transformational power of education is seen in this statement, as he emphasizes the importance of aligning education with pragmatism and scientific investigation. This highlights his comprehensive approach, which encompasses both natural sciences and social sciences. The core of Nguyen Truong To's educational philosophy can be defined by its practical focus and dedication to fostering a well-rounded and knowledgeable population capable of effectively engaging with and making valuable contributions to the intricacies of contemporary society. His suggestions for a broader and more varied educational curriculum continue to be significant and persuasive, particularly in the current setting of higher education in Vietnam. He advocates for a system that is adaptable to the needs of the present and the difficulties of the future.

Nguyen Truong To's educational vision was marked by a holistic approach that prioritized practical training, linguistic proficiency, and ethical guidance, with a specific emphasis on the natural sciences, particularly through the proposed creation of a Faculty of Technology. The focus on technology and industry demonstrated by him was remarkably insightful, showcasing a progressive viewpoint that was not commonly found among his peers in the Nguyen Dynasty, when these ideas were relatively new. It is evident that To deviated greatly from the conventional Confucian focus on classical study. Alternatively, he supported the incorporation of foreign language instruction and the exchange of students from different countries,

emphasizing the significance of worldwide involvement and the intercultural transmission of information. He suggested that by embracing the intellectual trends of the globe, Vietnam might keep pace with the progress made by Western societies.

To's support for international educational exchanges can be attributed to their understanding of the interconnectedness and mutual influence of different civilizations and knowledge systems over time. He noted that the quick progress of the West was partially attributed to its incorporation of Eastern knowledge and techniques. For To, this clearly demonstrated the reciprocal advantages of cross-cultural education. This viewpoint emphasizes the significance of adopting global educational methods and promoting cultural interactions, presenting them as crucial elements of a contemporary and robust educational system.

Practical method

Nguyen Truong To criticized the prevailing educational techniques of his time, which were characterized by repetitive memorization and rigid instruction, for lacking practical application and relevance to the actual world. This critique permeated all levels of society and was even recognized by monarchs such as Kings Minh Mang and Tu Duc. Tu Duc expressed his concern about the declining quality of education, noting that the focus on memorizing texts had led to a diminished ability to differentiate between truth and falsehood. He remarked, "Scholars merely rely on existing words to describe, without being able to distinguish between what is genuine and what is fake! Exam judges strictly adhere to the material and administer or approve the exam. Talent diminishes over time" (Dai, 1973: 390). To address these educational deficiencies, To advocated for a model of "authentic learning," which emphasized the incorporation of academic knowledge with hands-on practice. He promoted an educational approach that emphasized the immediate relevance of learning to everyday life and the wider socioeconomic context. To emphasize the significance of including practical tools like machinery and laboratory equipment in the study of natural sciences, this philosophy is summarized by the statement, "Apply what is useful, immediate, and enduring to yield advantages in the future" (Truong, 1988: 277). This viewpoint marked a change towards a more interactive and hands-on approach to education, with the goal of preparing students with the abilities and information needed to make meaningful contributions in today's complicated society. Nguyen Truong To advocated for a holistic approach to practical learning, which included not just traditional books like historical scriptures and legends, but also scientific and technical literature. He stressed the importance of integrating contemporary tools and technologies, many of which might be obtained from foreign sources, to improve the practical side of education. The feature mentioned was especially vital within the industrial setting, as it allowed for direct involvement with materials and processes, leading to a more profound comprehension and expertise in abilities. In addition, To's educational philosophy was characterized by a harmonious approach to both tradition and innovation. He contended that genuine learning should not involve completely rejecting established knowledge. Instead, it should entail a judicious amalgamation of the important components of conventional education with novel perspectives and methodologies, encompassing those acquired from foreign civilizations and even opponents. N.T. To proclaimed that "If you learn wise things, it doesn't matter whether it's the enemy's or yours" (Truong, 1988: 150). To's vision for the education system emphasized a receptive and inclusive learning style, which involved carefully incorporating both local and worldwide information. This method aimed to maintain cultural roots while also embracing global progress and concepts. Nguyen Truong To supported the use of hands-on learning and called for a change in the educational system of the Nguyen Dynasty. He believed that practical courses, which align with the current demands of society, should be included in the curriculum.

In his proposal, he suggested that national schools, provincial schools, private schools, and Huong and Hoi tests should prioritize topics related to the present circumstances, such as naturalization legislation, military strength, criminal matters, and other relevant subjects: "I ask that national schools, provincial schools, private schools, and Huong and Hoi exams all focus on the current situation, such as naturalization law, military power, criminal affairs, and more" (Truong, 1988: 194). The objective of this request for curriculum reform was to enhance the applicability of education to the current practical governance and societal concerns.

In addition, to highlight the importance of using real-world learning methods in the field of social sciences, it is recommended to incorporate a curriculum that covers topics such as "country laws, village rules, the pros and cons of teaching styles, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding and the ability to modify and rectify them. It is also suggested that governments should experiment with these methods in a village before implementing them on a larger scale in a province" (Truong, 1988: 249). This novel technique aimed to close the divide between theoretical knowledge and its practical implementation, promoting a learning environment that cultivates critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. When describing the responsibilities of instructors and learners in this paradigm, To suggested that educators should concentrate on providing knowledge that learners do not have, with a specific emphasis on practical skills and real-world applications. This pedagogical approach altered the relationship between the teacher and the learner. It was also more in line with Western educational beliefs that emphasize hands-on learning and the real-world use of information.

Overlaps of Nguyen Truong To's educational philosophy with his modern counterparts

Nguyen Truong To's intellectual trajectory, which is comparable to that of his contemporaries in Japan's Meirokusha (Huish, 1972), is characterized by an extensive interaction with Western knowledge that is customized to satisfy the requirements of their respective national civilizations. His reformist entreaties were sometimes received with skepticism and envy within the hallways of the Hue court, which rendered his voice a single one in a society that was averse to change. While the Meirokusha counted approximately thirty famous professors among its members, Nguyen Truong To stood fairly isolated in Vietnam. This intellectual unity with the geniuses of the Meiji era was founded not only on their respective receptivity to Western philosophy but also on their acute understanding of the prevalent world dynamics, which inspired their suggestions for the revitalization of the nation. This global vision, which was reflected in the analyses of Nguyen Truong To and was manifested in the writings of Meiji thinkers such as Fukuzawa Yukichi, highlighted a prescient awareness of the delicate interplay that exists between domestic imperatives and international tendencies. Nguyen Truong To promoted Vietnam's modernization, arguing for greater international trade and diplomatic concessions as strategic imperatives for national growth. This was done despite the fact that he acknowledged France's colonial ambitions. In spite of the fact that Vietnam and Japan are in very different circumstances, this nuanced perspective on national sovereignty indicates a shared intellectual vision that transcends geographical bounds. We believe that this also highlights the universal importance of their views in the quest for national reform and modernization.

By analyzing late 19th-century Vietnam's educational environment through Nguyen Truong To's reformist ideas, particularly his "authentic learning" ideology, one can see similarities with scholars like S. Douglass (2022) or B.K. Sharma & V.K. Shukla (2023) who advocate for comprehensive education that goes beyond subject-area limitations. Nguyen Truong To's call for an educational approach that combines theoretical knowledge with practical applications relevant to national development

and societal needs aligns with Douglass's integrative curriculum model aimed at developing people with a wide range of skills and the ability to make positive changes. Both approaches criticize segmented learning and urge for a more flexible and integrated educational structure that better targets the holistic goal of developing adaptable and innovative people with the essential skills and capacities.

Nguyen Truong To's educational reform perspective matches Sharma and Shukla (2023), who likewise promote multidisciplinary education. Both To's and Sharma and Shukla's educational models emphasize knowledge's unity. They see educational disciplines as parts of a whole. This complete understanding of knowledge allows the inclusion of different topic areas and improves instruction by exploiting subject interdependence. Sharma and Shukla, like much contemporary scholarship, believe that the optimum course organization should allow disciplines to learn from each other. Interdisciplinary approaches to teaching social sciences in secondary schools strive to go beyond academic disciplines and promote a more sophisticated and comprehensive grasp of societal processes. To's concept of "authentic learning," which emphasizes education beyond academic knowledge, supports this approach. It instead emphasizes a comprehensive research to build well-rounded, creative people who can handle modern society's challenges. The alignment of philosophical ideas underscores To's educational philosophy's lasting importance and ability to guide and improve modern social science pedagogy.

Some implications for higher education in Vietnam today

The higher education system in Vietnam, which plays a vital role in developing the country's human resources, has seen substantial changes in the last 35 years, characterized by innovation and advancement. This development demonstrates the Vietnamese government and the Communist Party of Vietnam's dedication to giving priority to education as a fundamental aspect of national policy. They acknowledge its crucial role in the country's progress and its integration into the global community. The Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, passed by the 8th Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam on November 4, 2013, emphasizes the dedication to completely revamp the education system to meet the requirements of industrialization, modernization, and a market economy with socialist principles. This initiative has stimulated improvements in the sector, ranging from the legal framework to the variety of educational programs, with the goal of raising the quality of teaching and curriculum to meet international benchmarks.

Notwithstanding these progressions, Vietnamese higher education has enduring difficulties, including a lack of harmony between academic achievements and the needs of the job market (Tran, 2022). This disconnection has resulted in a considerable proportion of graduates experiencing underemployment or finding employment in industries that are not connected to their training. This highlights the need for a more adaptable and practical approach to educational planning and curriculum development. To fully harness the potential of Vietnam's higher education system in contributing to the nation's socio-economic progress and maintaining its competitiveness globally, it is crucial to address these deficiencies.

A survey conducted among 60 enterprises in the industrial services sector in Ho Chi Minh City found that recent graduates are lacking in preparedness. Only 5% of graduates were rated as 'good' by employers in areas such as theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and professionalism (Ha Binh, 2014). The survey also revealed that 15% of graduates were rated as 'fair,' 30% as 'average,' and 40% as 'unsatisfactory.' This highlights the pressing necessity for a thorough revamp of Vietnam's higher education system in order to improve its pertinence and effectiveness in accordance with the country's socio-economic development objectives.

In order to tackle these difficulties, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive strategy that involves providing financial resources, specialized knowledge, and cutting-edge technology to the higher education industry. In addition, incorporating the perspectives of distinguished intellectuals, both from inside the country and beyond, can offer a diverse range of ideas to enhance the educational philosophy and methodology utilized. Adopting Nguyen Truong To's real learning theory may effectively revitalize higher education in Vietnam, guaranteeing that it matches current demands and produces highly skilled and adaptable graduates.

(a) According to To's philosophy of authentic learning, universities should combine theoretical knowledge with practical application to meet global integration needs. This method emphasizes the need of understanding educational goals to ensure that teaching and learning are meaningful and representative of educational quality. Students are central to this educational style. The goal is for graduates to have the skills and knowledge to succeed in the modern world. To's curriculum emphasizes STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) courses and practical problem-solving to challenge traditional, repetitive learning. In Vietnam, higher education must improve its importance and excellence and foster a fair and lively academic environment to satisfy modern society and the labor market. This includes merit-based hiring, equitable employment placement, and encouraging teacher and student innovation. To maximise To's genuine learning in modern Vietnamese higher education, defined norms and a student-focused learning environment are essential.

(b) Nguyen Truong To's emphasis on authentic learning emphasizes the need to restructure higher education in Vietnam to better serve students and the community. This method needs a shift from material-focused training to a more flexible paradigm that stresses practical skills and competencies. Vietnamese higher education programs should incorporate To's goals of academic knowledge and practical application. This method would help them solve practical challenges and encourage individual learning. This requires creating courses that promote creativity, autonomy, and flexibility in students while covering academic and professional fields.

Vietnamese institutions must update their program frameworks to adapt to global changes while remaining local. This includes a strong emphasis on interpersonal skills, information retrieval and evaluation, and hands-on learning to prepare graduates for a rapidly changing world. Including To's true learning theory in curriculum building can help Vietnam's workforce advance and integrate globally.

(c) Nguyen Truong To's true learning method can revitalize Vietnamese higher education teaching and learning. The existing focus on teachers and little student-teacher interaction needs to be replaced by methods that prioritize students, foster interaction, and stress practical learning. Despite its switch to a credit-based system, the current model fails to encourage student initiative or provide practical, ethical, and life skills education. The Vietnamese higher education system needs a more dynamic and interactive teaching technique that encourages active learning, critical thinking, and real-world application to address these issues. Colleges can incorporate To's focus on real learning to design programs that teach theoretical concepts and their practical applications. Students will be more prepared for current culture and the work market. This strategy needs a comprehensive reorganization of teaching and assessment methodologies to ensure practicality, innovation, and learner autonomy. This will improve pupils' talents.

(d) Nguyen Truong To's insights on authentic learning underline the need for Vietnamese higher education to promote independent thinking and critical evaluation. The rapid dissemination and availability of knowledge in the Fourth Industrial Revolution necessitates a shift from passive to active, inquiry-based learning. To advocates for an education system beyond memorization and rigidity. Instead, it promotes critical thinking and independence. In an age of technological advancement and information overload, the ability to differentiate, assess, and use knowledge

creatively is invaluable. Implementing To's practical learning principles requires integrating them into educational philosophies and curriculum. Teaching and learning will become dynamic and interesting. This adjustment encourages students to actively participate in the curriculum, which helps them learn problem-solving, inventiveness, and adaptation. Instead of just teaching, institutions help students explore and apply knowledge under this paradigm. We believe that adopting a more liberal education model is crucial for fostering a generation that can succeed in a globalized and complicated world. This model will equip individuals with the skills to overcome challenges, embrace diversity, and make important contributions to society.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of Nguyen Truong To's philosophical underpinnings and his enduring vision for improving education, we can gain insight into the profound depth and forward-thinking nature of his genuine educational ideology. To's critique of the current educational standards and his subsequent proposals for a more pragmatic, inclusive, and dynamic system were efforts to alter the present system. These efforts were motivated by a robust philosophical conviction regarding the essence of learning, knowledge, and societal progress. To's thinking extended beyond mere acquisition of information, advocating for an educational encounter that was intimately linked to the pragmatic aspects of existence and the inherent artistic talents of individuals. The emphasis on 'authentic learning'—which integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application—corresponds to a pragmatic approach to education. This approach advocates for an educational system that not only imparts knowledge to students, but also empowers them to effectively and innovatively apply this knowledge in many contexts. This development is vital for our educational system.

Furthermore, To's vision was inherently humanistic, placing the student at the center of the educational process. He challenged the conventional teacher-centered method and promoted a more interactive and dynamic learning environment, where teachers and students work together to investigate and apply knowledge. The shift towards a more interactive and student-focused approach in education reflects a wider philosophical conviction in the significance of nurturing individuals' cognitive independence and analytical reasoning abilities (Zeichner, Payne & Brayko, 2015; Rainer & Guyton, 1999; Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

In addition, To's endorsement of including practical subjects and contemporary sciences into the curriculum, alongside traditional academics, displays a holistic approach to education. This viewpoint acknowledges the intricate and interconnected nature of human knowledge in all fields of study, in line with modern researchers such as S. Douglass (2022) and B.K. Sharma & V.K. Shukla (2023). His educational reform initiatives were driven by a mindset that sought to harmonize traditional knowledge with the advancements and requirements of the contemporary world. Our analysis shows that Nguyen Truong To's educational innovations were founded on a philosophy that prioritized adaptability, practical relevance, and the holistic development of individuals. The significance of his vision for a reformed educational system in Vietnam, which tackles the challenges of contemporary society and the interconnected world, remains substantial. We strongly believe that To's authentic learning ideology offers a dependable structure for continuous educational transformations, fostering a system that nurtures independent thinking, innovation, and the practical application of information.

Bibliographic references

Chu, T.D. & Nguyen, T.T.L. (2019). Nguyen Truong To's educational reform ideology and its significance for the cause of educational reform in Vietnam today. *Education Magazine*, 7(1), 8-10.

- Dai, A.T.L. (1973). Main Edition, volume 27. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Ding, H. (2007). Confucius's Virtue-Centered Rhetoric: A Case Study of Mixed Research Methods in Comparative Rhetoric. *Rhetoric Review*, 26(2), 142-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07350190709336706>
- Doan, T.C. (Ed.). (1996). Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean. Thuan Hoa Publishing House.
- Dougllass, S. (2022). Holistic Education Must Finally Overcome Subject-Area Barriers. *Journal of Education in Muslim Societies*, 3(2), 100-113.
- Duong N.D. (2014). Nguyen Truong To in the Cognitive Black Hole of the Late 19th Century. In: Nguyen, T.H., Vuong, D.C. & Duong, N.D. Nguyen Truong To yesterday and today. Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House, 91-95.
- Ha Binh. (2014). Enterprises grade students: Both theory and practice are weak. Tuoi Tre Electronic Newspaper. <https://tuoitre.vn/doanh-nghiep-cham-diem-sinh-vien-ly-thuyet-thuc-hanh-deu-yeu-608573.htm>.
- Huish, D.J. (1972). The Meirokusha: Some Grounds for Reassessment. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 32, 208-229.
- Le, S.T. (1997). History of Vietnamese ideology. Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Le, T.H. (2012). Nguyen Truong To's ideologies on education. *Vietnam Social Sciences Magazine*, 54(5), 49-53.
- Mishra, P. & Koehler, M.J. (2006). Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge: A Framework for Teacher Knowledge. *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, 108(6), 1017-1054.
- Nguyen D.C. (2014). Nguyen Truong To - The Rise of Individual Thinking. In: Nguyen, T.H., Vuong, D.C. & Duong, N.D. Nguyen Truong To yesterday and today. Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House, 125-146.
- Nguyen, T.L. (2013). Fukuzawa Yukichi and Nguyen Truong To - Education reform ideology. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House.
- Nguyen, T.H., Vuong, D.C. & Duong, N.D. (2014). Nguyen Truong To yesterday and today. Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House.
- Nguyen, T.N. (2017). Nguyen Truong To's educational ideology and its value for Vietnamese education today. Master's thesis in Philosophy. University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University.
- Pham H.T. (2014). Nguyen Truong To - Patriotic Catholics and Great Philosophers in Vietnam in the 19th Century. In: Nguyen, T.H., Vuong, D.C. & Duong, N.D. Nguyen Truong To yesterday and today. Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House, 147-162
- Rainer, J. & Guyton, E. M. (1999). Democratic practices in teacher education and the elementary classroom. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 15(1), 121-132.
- Sharma, B. K., & Shukla, V. K. (2023). Interdisciplinary Approach to Education with Special Reference to Social Science at Secondary Schools. *BSSS Journal of Education*, 12(1), 41-51.
- Tra, L. & Dang, H.T. (1990). Personality and works. Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.
- Tran, T.M.T. (2022). Innovating higher education in Vietnam: Situation and solutions, *Electronic Communist Magazine*, <https://www.tapchiconsan.org.vn/web/guest/chi-tiet-tim-kiem/-/2018/825408/%C4%91oi-moi-giao-duc-%C4%91ai-hoc-o-viet-nam--thuc-trang-va-giai-phap.aspx> .
- Truong, B.C. (1988). Nguyen Truong To - People and manuscripts. Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.
- Truong, T.D., Hallinger, P. & Sanga, K. (2016). Confucian values and school leadership in Vietnam: Exploring the influence of culture on principal decision making. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 45(1), 77-100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143215607877>

- Vinh, S. (1999). Nguyen-Truong-To and the Quest for Modernization in Vietnam. *Nichibunken Japan Review*, 11(1), 55-74.
- Vu G. (2014). Tu Luc Van Doan and Some Innovative Ideas of Nguyen Truong To. In: Nguyen, T.H., Vuong, D.C. & Duong, N.D. *Nguyen Truong To yesterday and today*. Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House, 179-200.
- Vuong, D.C. (2014). Nguyen Truong To's Reform Proposals. In: Nguyen, T.H., Vuong, D.C. & Duong, N.D. *Nguyen Truong To yesterday and today*. Hanoi: Knowledge Publishing House, 19-90.
- Zeichner, K. M., Payne, K. A., & Brayko, K. (2015). Democratizing Teacher Education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 66(2), 122-135.

Words: 7547

Characters: 53 336 (30 standard pages)

Dr. Tu Duy Do
Ho Chi Minh City Open University
35-37 Ho Hao Hon, Co Giang Ward,
Ho Chi Minh City,
Vietnam
tu.dd@ou.edu.vn
ORCID: 0009-0001-0866-283X

Dr. Phuong Thi Hong Nguyen – corresponding author
Ho Chi Minh City Open University
35-37 Ho Hao Hon, Co Giang Ward,
Ho Chi Minh City,
Vietnam
phuong.nth@ou.edu.vn
ORCID: 0000-0002-4405-4946