



Perspective on Education & Training Towards Khmer Ethnic People In The Southwest of Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

On the basis of the guidelines and policies of the Party, this article aims at commenting on the current situation of education and training for the Khmer ethnic people in the southwest, thereby proposing practical solutions in improving the quality of education and training activities in the current period.

Keywords: Education - training, Khmer ethnic people, Southwest.

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INTRODUCTION

The Mekong Delta, also known as Southwest, is a key economic and agricultural zone of Vietnam with key commodities that play an important position not only at the national level but also at the regional and international level. However, according to recorded comments from education experts, the current status of education and training results in the southwest is still lagging behind compared to the national common ground, especially education and training for Khmer ethnic people in reality is even more strenuous and insufficient which needs to be resolved at the soonest.

CONTENT

Guidelines and policies of the Party and State on education and training for the Khmer ethnic people

Initiated from the very beginning, the Party and State issued many undertakings and policies to take care of the lives of Khmer ethnic people, including policies on care and development of education and training for Khmer ethnic people. In 1981, the Secretariat of the Party Central Committee issued Directive No.117-CT/TW dated September 29, 1981 on "Work for the Khmer ethnic people". In 1982, the Council of Ministers issued Directive No. 122/CT-HDBT dated May 12, 1982 on "Work for Khmer people". In particular, the Directive directs the care of education and raising people's knowledge of Khmer people, accordingly, the Council of Ministers requires:

Firstly, the broadcasts in Khmer language must be introduced in provinces where Khmer ethnic people are residing in. For Khmer ethnic people-resided provinces, it needs to improve the existing Khmer-language broadcast and put an increase in broadcasting hours in Khmer language to deeply educate and disseminate guidelines, policies of the Party and State and encourage the patriotic emulation movement among Khmer ethnic people.

Secondly, with regard to high schools that have been degraded, in addition to financial resource mobilization from local people, localities need to support financially to repair, build or equip the school with more school supplies. It's acceptable to temporarily borrow a temple as a teaching base, importantly to keep good relations with the temple's parishioner and respect the freedom of religion of Khmer local people.

Thirdly, the local authority needs to prepare a training plan for Khmer-language teachers and the number of those trained teachers mustn't be scattered. For teachers who are assigned to deliver two languages – lessons, if they have more teaching hours than the contracted hours, then they must be paid for their extra teaching hours.

Fourthly, Khmer ethnic students who finish lower secondary school will be considered for admission to high school without having to pass compulsory high school examination.

Fifthly, to step up the movement of complementary education to quickly eliminate illiteracy for local people. Maintain the cultural supplementary schools in Khmer people-crowded districts so that Khmer ethnic cadres can access to and take turns going to school, including Khmer ethnic cadres at grassroots level.

In conclusion, those timely and well-designed policies on education and training have contributed to the improvement of academic standards and education levels for Khmer ethnic people in the southwest.

In 1991, the Secretariat of the Communist Party of Vietnam continued to issue Directive No.68-CT/TW dated 18/4/1991 on “Remaining and pending tasks on Khmer ethnic people”. The Directive has indicated the limitations and problems in education & training, raising the knowledge and academic standard for Khmer ethnic people” as following:

“Ethnic language teaching has not been uniformly regulated, the illiteracy and inaccessibility to school rates still remains high. The number of high school graduates admitted to university or vocational school is still inadequate. Khmer ethnic cadres, especially at the grassroots level are inadequately developed, both low in quantity and poor in quality. Accordingly, the Secretariat requested that “going in hand with consolidating and developing general education curriculum for high school, kindergarten, complementary education, we also need to focus on strengthening and developing all kinds of boarding schools for ethnic minorities and boarding schools for young adults across districts and provinces where Khmer ethnic people are residing. Opening pedagogical schools in the Mekong Delta to train and foster teachers who are Khmer locals including capable monks and bonzes then we have qualified teachers for bilingual teaching programs at elementary, middle and high school. Pay attention to the training of Khmer ethnic cadres at Can Tho university. Khmer ethnic students are entitled to tuition – free at all education levels. Research and grant scholarships to students under preferential treatment policy or excellent students at all education levels. We also need to focus on elimination of illiteracy and re-illiteracy [1].

Summary of Directive No.68-CT/TW on January 10, 2018 the Secretariat issued Directive No.19 – CT/TW on strengthening work in Khmer ethnic people in the new situation. The Directive affirms: striving to 2020, basically eliminating illiteracy for local people. Develop unified curriculum and regulations on teaching and enrollment content for the secondary School of Complimentary Pali education (**continuing education**) and Khmer language should be introduced at all education levels and Nam-Tong Khmer Buddhist University [2].

Over the past years, the Government has also issued plenty of documents on education and training for Khmer ethnic people such as Decree No. 134/ND-CP dated November 14, 2006 of the Government Regulations on higher education enrollment including university, college, vocational training as stipulated in the national education system of Vietnam; Decision No.20/QD-TTg dated 20/01/2006 issued by the Prime Minister on education, training and vocational education in the Mekong Delta by 2010; Decision No. 1033/QD-TTg dated June 30, 2011 issued by the Prime Minister on the education, training and vocational training development in the Mekong River Delta in the period 2011 – 2015.

Real picture about education & training for Khmer ethnic people in the Southwest

Tra Vinh, Vinh Long, Hau Giang, Soc Trang, An Giang, Kien Giang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau and Can Tho city are homes and densely populated towns of 1.2 million Khmer locals, Kinh and Chinese people to live together. In the nation’s history, Khmer ethnic people have made great and very important contributions to the resistance war against French colonialism and U.S imperialists, make the country wealthier and more powerful. Over the past years, the implementation of indigenous people policies in general and the implementation of indigenous people policies designed for Khmer ethnic people in the southwest in particular has brought positive changes in various aspects: the living standard of Khmer locals has been gradually improved. They believe in the state guidelines and policies of the Vietnamese Communist Party as long as they implement and comply with all state policies and regulations of the law. Actively moving the economic structure, building new -style rural areas, the indigenous tradition and culture of Khmer locals is preserved and promoted; Khmer locals are more and more aware of their mastery.

In the provinces and cities where Khmer ethnic people are residing, the local authority develops different forms of education institutions to name a few: ethnic boarding schools; vocational schools of the southwest; the schools under Khmer Nam Tong education system; Khmer ethnic students admitted to Can Tho university and numbers of classes are organized in Khmer pagodas as followed:

Firstly, with regards to high school education; over the past time, the development of general education in general and ethnic minority education in particular captures the attention from the Party and State, committees, and local authorities at all levels. There currently exists 28 boarding high schools in the southwest. Implementing Decision 1640/QD-TTg dated September 21, 2011 of the Prime Minister approving the Project “Consolidation and development of the ethnic minority boarding school system in the period 2011-2012, schools have been well funded with materials and facilities, also the number of enrollments and the quality of training has been gradually improved.

Secondly, in terms of the Vietnamese-Khmer language bilingual teaching program; the whole southwest has 305 schools with 2.489 classes and 59.755 learners. This is the result of implementing the policy on maintaining and promoting the cultural identity and raising people’s intellection for Khmer ethnic people. Thanks to the right perspective and policy, the teaching and learning of Khmer language has achieved practical results, Khmer ethnic people trust the leadership of the Party and the State, gradually raising people’s intellection, and developing education in the Southwest.

Thirdly, classes in Khmer pagodas: many pagodas in Southwest become learning centers for Khmer ethnic people and Khmer language classes are organized mostly here. The organization of classes has obtained the consent from the State, however the education sector hasn't found an effective mechanism for the administration of teaching and learning. The ethnic studies curriculum in the pagoda includes: general educational curriculum (applicable for elementary education), Khmer and Pali language, Buddhism studies. Length of learning is 3 years; the study period lasts for 3 years. The pagodas organize examinations and issue certificates for graduate students.

Fourthly, higher and vocational education is mainly administered by the State according to the areas of residence. Particularly, Tra Vinh University opened the specialized training: Southern Khmer Language, Culture and Arts serving ethnic religious and cultural affairs in the Southwest. With good implementation of special admission to ethnic minority students (ethnic minority students directly admitted to college and university without sitting for entrance exams), policy on tuition fee exemption and the expansion of scale and forms of training and education has contributed to the formation of a contingent ethnic minority clerisy, contributing to improving the quality of local manpower.

In addition to the above-mentioned education institutions, the Southwest also provides vocational education schools for young Khmer adults. Up to present, thousands of workers have settled and found jobs in industrial parks and have been given the opportunity to work abroad. However, the organization and management of education institutions in Khmer ethnic minority groups still shows shortcomings to name a few:

Firstly, the managerial slack in organization and administration of education institutions, the political and ideological work does not grab sufficient attention; especially the Party and the Unit haven't reached a consensus in management.

Secondly, admission criteria, quality and efficiency of education in these educational institutions are still poor and uneven. The training scale of provincial-level boarding high schools for ethnic minority students is still limited, unable to meet the enrollment demand.

Thirdly, the number of ethnic minority students matriculated in other studying in non-scholarship majors (only a few localities have recent had policies to support the number of excellent students, students with high academic achievement). On the other hand, Khmer local students who are exceptionally admitted to university (without taking university entrance exam) will be fully funded scholarship. This difference leads to comparison between families whose children are attending university.

Fourthly, the poor quality of ethnic minority cadres affects the quality of education and training for Khmer ethnic people in the Southwest. The reason for the above-mentioned limitations and shortcomings stem from the following reasons:

Firstly, the preferential policy for Khmer ethnic minority intelligentsia is not implemented. There is a unified management mechanism and support policy from the State for teaching and learning Khmer Literature and Pali language in the private schools.

Secondly, education and training among Khmer ethnic people is currently not associated with actual demand, there is no master plan yet or associated with socio-economic development strategy of each locality. When it comes to choose a major or academic fields, the decision of many ethnic minority high school graduates is still hasty, ill-advised rather than well-thought out.

Approaches and solutions to improve the quality of education and training for Khmer ethnic people in the Southwest.

Direction

Focusing on the direction of implanting effectively Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW dated November 4th, 2013 of the Central Committee of CPV on "fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education, serving industrialization and modernization in a socialist-oriented market economy during international integration". Continuing to improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training; especially the boarding schools at all levels for ethnic minorities in the country; upgrading facilities; spending more on school supplies and teaching tools and equipment; consolidating and perfecting the boarding schools for ethnic minorities in the area; focusing on training and fostering bilingual teachers (Vietnamese – Khmer language program) for ethnic minorities at all educational levels. Pay more attention to building kindergartens, kindergartens and vocational training schools for ethnic minorities; putting vocational training programs into boarding schools for ethnic minorities associated with diversification and rapid development of forms of training and retraining and vocational training in ethnic minority residence. Fully and timely implement the special college/university admission (ethnic minority students are directly admitted to university/college without taking the compulsory entrance examination), policies on ethnic minority students in ethnic minority boarding schools and other schools [3].

Solutions

Firstly, focus on economic development, improving the living standard for Khmer ethnic people. In order for Khmer ethnic people to be able to take good care of their children's education, they must be wealthy. Therefore, focusing on economic development will help improve the standard of living, so that these families can afford an education for their children.

Secondly, local authorities need to determine on facilitating and creating favorable conditions for comprehensive socio-economic development in the Khmer ethnic community; pay attention to new rural development, promoting the creativity of Khmer ethnic people; encourage and facilitate new business models in the local areas; strengthening the work of information propaganda, bringing scientific and technical progress to Khmer ethnic minority groups and instructing them how to access the internet for updating news and widening the knowledge serving production and life; encouraging the integration of crop-livestock that suits the local environment in the southwest.

Thirdly, we need to pay adequate attention to budget allocation mechanisms for education and training. We also need to review, re-arrange the planning of education and training institutions from kindergarten to tertiary in the Mekong Delta. We need to ensure harmony in terms of both structure and education outcomes for all levels, as a basis for the promulgation of mechanisms and policies for development and training and to invest in school facilities.

The State prioritizes budget investment for education and training development throughout planning programs and projects and human resource development plans and schemes, increasing the norm of budget expenditures for the development of education–training for Khmer ethnic people in the Mekong Delta.

We need to allocate a budget for schools/education institutions with professions that are high in demand in the southwest; with large investment cost but low profits; at the same time, strengthen management in investment activities in education-training to ensure quality. Increase the budget expenditures norms and take advantage of the central budget for the education-training sector.

Promoting cooperation and association between R&D organizations, universities, vocational training schools and business so we can invest in depth, focus and address, attach close connection between training and scientific research, improve the quality of human resource in order to meet the requirement of market labor and society, and at the same time effectively use school-to-work graduates. Through the linkage mechanism between universities, colleges, R&D institutes, businesses, scientific and technology personnel can participate in teaching/lecturing.

We need to have a plan to wisely and efficiently use different types of funds namely: ODA, NGO funds, preferential loans spent on education and training development. Attracting foreign investment, encouraging socialization of education. Encouraging training institutions (of private and public sector) to invest more in school facilities and renovation in curriculum design, improving the capacity of lecturers and teachers in order to improve the teaching quality. Third, in terms of facilities construction and investment in education-training, it is necessary to study carefully the design and construction of works prior to construction as the construction works needs to be aesthetically attractive and culturally compatible with the cultural environment of Khmer ethnic people in order to build a better system of education and training. The classrooms should be built in a way that is well-illuminated and conducive for both students and teachers, and serving as a multiple-purpose space: teaching, learning and reading. Pay attention to the customs and traditions of Khmer ethnic people, nice school views and schoolyards for students should be taken into account prior to construction.

Fourthly, school facilities should be continually upgraded; teaching and learning tools/equipment should be up-to-date and Khmer cultural identity-styled.

CONCLUSION

During the process of revolutionary leadership, the CPV and President Ho Chi Minh always attached great importance to implementing the policy of equality, solidarity, and assistance among ethnic groups for mutual development especially, in the period of renovation and integration, the CPV and state paid great attention to the implementation of ethnic minority policy and gained certain achievements: the standard of living was improved greatly, the great national unity bloc was consolidated, the relationship between CPV and its People was strengthened, creating new position and force for Vietnamese revolution. The national policy towards ethnic minority groups has been paid adequate attention and considered a strategic policy. Therefore, taking care of the development of education and training for Khmer ethnic group is to well implement the ethnic minority policy of the CPV and State. In the current period, the work of education and training for Khmer ethnic groups in the southwest plays a crucial role in training skilled workforce to meet the

new requirements of the region and the whole country, contributing to the success implementation of the goal “wealthy people, powerful country, equal, democratic and civilized society”.

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