

## Higher Education in South Vietnam in 1956-1975

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### ABSTRACT

In 1954, after the signing of the Geneva Accords, Vietnam was temporarily divided into two regions with two different political regimes. While North Vietnam was liberated, in the South, the US replaced France and established a separate country called the Republic of Vietnam (ROV) as a tool for the neo-colonialism policy and the global strategy of the US in this region. The US relentlessly provided for the ROV to consolidate its military, political and economic strengths; and at the same time focused on investing in educational development - including higher education to solve the problem of training human resources for the regime and for studying practical issues of social life in the South. Therefore, higher education in South Vietnam was associated with and affected by the context of war in the South and became one of the important policies of the US. A highlight of higher education in South Vietnam was the parallel existence of both French and American trends, which led to the gradual shift towards values of American model. Each trend mentioned above itself has certain advantages and limitations. Researching the transition in higher education of South Vietnam, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of education trends allows some practical experience to be drawn for the reform of higher education in Vietnam today.

### Keywords

Republic of Vietnam, Higher Education, Transition, France and the U.S.

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### Introduction

The victory of Vietnamese army in the battle of Dien Bien Phu (1954) forced the French to sign the Geneva Accords to end the war on the basis of respecting the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Indochina countries. The Accords made a decision that led to tremendous changes in the history of Vietnam 21 years later: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was temporarily divided into two regions of North and South (the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel was established as provisional military demarcation line) and would be re-unified through a free general election across the country two years later (1956). However, the course of history did not completely follow the spirit and words of the Accords. In South Vietnam, the US was determined to dismiss France to directly intervene in and conspired to make the division of Vietnam permanent. In order to facilitate this intervention, in 1955, the US backed and established in South Vietnam a separate country called the Republic of Vietnam, led by Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister (Tran Nam Tien 2020, p. 7). After its establishment, under American sponsorship, the ROV administration enhanced its military, political and economic strengths, and at the same time focused on developing education, including higher education. On the basis of inheriting French model, the ROV administration sought for the development of higher education to train human resources for both socioeconomic and cultural development and for war service in the South. However, since the initial foundation of higher education in South Vietnam was the inheritance from French higher education, and due to the lack of long-term development plan, tight budgets and the

strict dependence on the US, higher education in South Vietnam was less influenced by the education policies of the ROV government and mainly by external factors, namely the influence of French and American higher education model.

Notable research works relating to this issue include: Nguyen Dinh Hoa 1961. *Strategies to build National Higher Education*; Do Trong Hue 1965. *Issues in education: French program or Vietnamese program*; Dao Nhat Tan 1970. *A Human and National Education*; Nguyen Van Trang 1972. *Educational issues*; Do Ba Khe 1972. *Community Colleges*; Doan Viet Hoat 1972. *Southern University Fever*; Tran Ngoc Dinh 1975. *New American colonial higher education in South Vietnam before liberation*; Long Dien 1977. *The organization and activities of USAID in the new colonial education of South Vietnam*; Nguyen Thi Hong Cuc 2014. *Management of higher education in South Vietnam (1954-1975)*; Tran Van Chanh 2014. *Education in South Vietnam*; Pham Ngoc Bao Liem 2013. *The process of conversion and the establishment of universities in South Vietnam (in 1954-1975 period)*; Ngo Minh Oanh 2019. *General education in the South in 1954-1975*; Doan Viet Hoat 1971. *The development of modern higher Education in Vietnam: a focus on cultural and social-political forces*; Do Ba Khe 1970. *The community college concept: a study of its relevance to postwar reconstruction in Vietnam*; David Sloper, Le Thac Can 1995. *Higher Education in Vietnam- Change and Response*; Deborah, Shapley 1975. *Science in Vietnam: The Postwar North Seeks American Assistance*; Yee, Albert H. (Ed) 1995. *East Asia Higher Education: Traditions and Transformations*, etc. All of the above works mainly

introduce the history of establishment and development of higher education in South Vietnam, its organizational structure, goals and contents of training, teachers, students, achievements and limitations of higher education in South Vietnam in 1956-1975. These topics are often of interest of most Vietnamese scholars. In fact, there are very few studies on higher education in South Vietnam that take the perspective of receiving the influence of French and American higher education, as well as thoroughly explain why there has been such a change. These are large academic gaps that we want to fill in by the content of this article.

On the basis of access to original documents (archives) including Directives, Ordinances, Reports, Dispatches, etc. of the ROV government relating to higher education at Vietnam National Archives centers, as well as the research works of Vietnamese and foreign scholars in the same field, we identify a new approach to research the history of higher education, which uses historical, logical and interdisciplinary/cross-disciplinary research methods to supplement the findings of previous scholars by presenting a comprehensive and insightful view of the factors with impacts on higher education in South Vietnam; the transition process of higher education in South Vietnam from being influenced by French model to receiving the influence of American higher education in two periods of 1956-1964 and 1965-1975 in the following aspects: structural system, goals, programs and methods of training. From there, we explain why there was such a change and make comments and assessments about this change.

### Foundations for the Establishment of Higher Education in South Vietnam

The higher education system in South Vietnam began with the transformation of France's Indochina University (Université Indochinoise) after the main campus of this university moved from Hanoi to Sai Gon in November 1954. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, after completing the invasion of Indochina, the French initially carried out the so-called "mission of civilizing and disseminating universal values of mankind" to justify their action (Nguyen Thuy Phuong 2020, p. 9). French authorities and colonial government officials sought to establish an education in colonized countries, as they believed "schools are the most effective and most certain tool in the hands of conquerors" (Luro, Gustave Dumoutier 1887, p. 1). After preliminary research, in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the French established a rudimentary colonial education across Indochina, including Vietnam (Nguyen Thuy Phuong 2020, p. 9). In that context, on May 16, 1906, the Indochina University was established in Hanoi, Vietnam, which was the first modern Western model of university founded in Vietnam by the French during the colonial period and tasked with "popularizing European knowledge and methods in the Far East, mainly through French language" (Governor-General Paul Bean 1906, File No. 48.042 GGI, p. 2). The University was led by a French chancellor who was appointed by the President of France on a secondment to the government of the State of Vietnam for a term of 3 years, while the vice-chancellor was a Vietnamese. The curriculum of Indochina University took after the French higher education program,

and the university only recruited lecturers who had French degrees.

On March 8, 1949, French Prime Minister Vicent Auriol and Bao Dai (representative of the State of Vietnam) signed the Elysee Accords (French: *Accords de l'Elysée*) with many contents, including the provision that France recognized the independence of the government of the State of Vietnam established by Bao Dai, in return, the government agreed for the French to maintain their universities in Vietnam in the name of the French Union (Nghiem The To 1954, p. 89). After that, the French government and Bao Dai also signed a Cultural Treaty on December 30, 1949 and an Annex (for transition clauses) on January 8, 1951, including provisions on the transfer of this institution to the government of the State of Vietnam (Luro, Gustave Dumoutier, 1887, p. 8). Legally speaking, these agreements ensured the rights of French people working in the field of higher education in Vietnam.

After the Geneva Accords in 1954, nearly 1 million people migrated from the North to the South of Vietnam. In that migration, higher education institutions along with the majority of lecturers and students of Indochina University in Hanoi also moved to South Vietnam. Before withdrawing from Vietnam, on May 11, 1955, the French transferred Indochina University to the government of the State of Vietnam and had it renamed as National University of Vietnam (Vo Van Sen, Luu Van Quyet 2019). By 1956, when the ROV administration was officially inaugurated in South Vietnam, the Southern higher education system (including National University of Vietnam) was under the management, organization and administration of ROV government.

### French Higher Education Remained its Influence on Higher Education in South Vietnam in 1956-1964

#### Influence on Structure

After taking over higher education institutions, on March 1, 1957, the ROV government promulgated Ordinance No. 45-GD to rename *National University of Vietnam* to *Sai Gon University*. This was considered the first higher education institution following Western model that laid the foundation for the formation of higher education model in South Vietnam. Also according to Decree No. 45-GD (March 1, 1957), the ROV government established a new University called *Hue University* with the function of "promoting Vietnamese culture and at the same time synthesizing national culture with international thoughts, in order to help with the training of citizens who are capable of serving the country" (ROV Prime Minister Residence 1957, File No. 1866, p. 5). Sai Gon University and Hue University were both based on the stereotype of Indochina University as multidisciplinary universities (which consist of many schools/colleges, or faculties) (Note: French higher education uses the system of faculties (faculté) as the foundation for organizing universities. "Faculté" is often translated as "faculty" (equivalent to a school/college of national and regional universities of Vietnam today). In the university (université) model of French, "faculté" is truly a

“school” or “college”, while “université” is a “university”. In the French higher education regulations, “faculté” is higher than “école supérieure” (post-secondary school) (“faculté” provides doctoral training programs (docteur)). By the early 1960s, Sai Gon University consisted of: School of Literature, School of Law, School of Medicine, School of Science (Saigon School of Science), College of Architecture; while Hue University consisted of: School of Literature, School of Law, School of Science and School of Medicine (Le Cung 2012).

In addition to the two universities, in order to train engineers, agricultural and industrial workers, the ROV government also established several Post-secondary schools and Vocational schools in the public education system. Post-secondary schools established in this period included: National College of Agriculture, Forestry and Livestock Farming (founded in 1955) and Phu Tho National Technical Center (founded in 1957) (Ministry of Education, ROV 1967, File No. 5701).

### Organization and Management Structure

In terms of organization and management, Universities in South Vietnam during this period basically continued to follow the model of multidisciplinary universities of Indochina University founded by the French earlier. These two universities were founded by the state, and the Ministry of Education played a general coordinating role for the consistence of education philosophy, staff governance and finance. The Chancellor of a University was nominated by Minister of Education, approved by the Senate and appointed by President's decree. A Chancellor managed a university with the aide of Vice-chancellor(s) and a Governing Board. Assisting the Chancellor were Departments of Administration, Finance and Culture to deal with the works of the University. In addition, there was a Governing Board where the Chancellor acted as President, the General Secretary of the university as secretary of the Board, and members consisting of Deans, Vice-Deans and Professors representing schools/colleges (Ministry of Education, ROV 1965, File No. 236). The heads of each faculty (equivalent to a school/college today) were a Dean (equivalent to a Chancellor today) - who had the biggest responsibility for the operation of the Faculty, and a Vice-Dean. Faculties were almost entirely independent of each other in terms of operation, and were situated in different locations. The finance for public universities depended on the allocation from national budget through Ministry of Education and must be approved by the Congress; personnel, programs and curriculums of universities were almost autonomous on the basis of approval by Minister of Education (ROV Prime Minister Residence 1958, File No.3214, p. 3).

Each Post-secondary school under a public university was under the control of a Director appointed by Minister of Education based on the proposal of the Chancellor and the election results at a meeting of the school's Governing Board. The Director of a Post-secondary school was assisted by the Board and the Office of the school. The Governing Board of a Post-secondary school consisted of the Director (President) and members being professors. The Office of a Post-secondary school was run by the General Secretary.

The General Secretary had the same rank as Chief of Administrative Office (author's note: an office of a Department under a Ministry) and was appointed by the Chancellor (ROV Prime Minister Residence 1958, File No. 3214, p. 21).

Thus, after ROV government took over the universities left by the French, in terms of structure, organization and management, higher education in South Vietnam from 1956 to 1964 still bore the characteristics of French higher education which was shaped in Vietnam from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Educational institutions included universities (in which there are many schools/colleges) and a system of Post-secondary schools and Vocational schools. In which, engineering disciplines were mostly trained at post-secondary and vocational level, and there was no School/College of engineering established during this period. In terms of management structure, all Universities were under the administration of Ministry of Education. Important decisions regarding recruitment or promotion of professors, procurement of building materials, building costs, etc. must be presented to Ministry of Education for approval.

### Programs and Methods of Training

Before 1964, the training objectives, programs and methods of most Universities in South Vietnam still followed the French model: the program was determined by a council of professors of the School/College or Faculty, often focused on providing general knowledge of many different disciplines, not necessarily covered a certain field and also not compulsorily of a professional nature. For example, the training objectives of School of Literature (under Sai Gon National University) clearly stated: “Unlike other schools, the School of Literature does not train specialists, but aim to improve general knowledge in many different disciplines, such as Philosophy, Vietnamese Literature, History - Geography, Living Language, Humanities, etc. (Viet Lien 1962, p. 74); Sai Gon School of Science also clearly claimed in its training objectives that it “aims to provide students with some basic knowledge of science, help students get familiar with the phenomena occurring in the universe and nature, and train them to have more sophisticated and scientific thinking in order to form a strong foundation for their inventions later on ” (Dac Lo Department of Psychology and Career 1974, p. 163). Because of that goal, in the curriculum of universities, there were two parts of training: theory and professional knowledge. Students studied basic subjects (general subjects) in social sciences at School of Literature and subjects in natural sciences at School of Science. Professional knowledge was taught at the school where the student registered to receive a degree (Vo Van Sen, Luu Van Quyet 2019).

Nonetheless, the ROV government expected Universities to change their training programs and methods, which were influenced by the French style (chapter-based, theoretically heavy learning for general and academic knowledge) and switch to the American education model (which focuses on providing experimental and practical scientific knowledge). In fact, there were many delegations of U.S. cultural and educational organizations as well as universities under the guidance of the United States Agency for International

Development (USAID) visited South Vietnam to conduct research and propose higher education policies and programs; many projects and programs as a result of the research of such delegations were presented to the ROV government for the reform of training programs and methods, etc. However, until 1964, there had been no higher education reform programs or projects implemented by the government (Ministry of Education, ROV 1965, File No. 236). Thus, the training programs and methods in 1956-1964 were still planned by Universities based on the principals of "education of humanity", "national education", "liberal education", and mainly followed the system of *academic year* and *certificate* of the French higher education style (Pham Ngoc Bao Liem 2019, p. 50).

The *academic year* system was mainly applied in Schools of Pedagogy, Pharmacy, Medicine and Post-secondary schools (Electricity, Agriculture, Forestry and Livestock Farming, Architecture, etc.) With the *academic year* system, students were required to proceed from one year to another in the following order: Foundation year, first year, second year, third year, fourth year. To graduate, students must take and pass all final exams of each year, then pass the graduation examination to be recognized as having finished the training program. For the *certificate* system, students are able to select subjects based on their capabilities, receive a Certificate after passing the exam of a subject, and obtain a Bachelor's Degree after having accumulated enough Certificates. However, whether following academic year system or certificate system, students were required to attend a Preparatory class and must pass the exam for a diploma before advancing to first year of college (Vo Van Sen, Luu Van Quyet 2019).

The training time at universities as well as between departments of each school was also not consistent: 4 years in some universities, 3 or 2 years in some others (in which 4-year programs were popular). For example, at School of Literature (under Sai Gon University), students with a Literature Diploma only needed to accumulate certificate of 4 subjects and it often took them only 3 years to be awarded a Bachelor's degree in Literature. However, there were also schools that had quite rigorous curriculum which lasted 5 to 6 years, where students had to go on internship right from the first year (most were schools of Medicine, Pharmacy and Dentistry). Some schools even stipulated that after being admitted, students must find a pharmacy to do internship as a condition to attend the first year of training (Ministry of Education, ROV 1967, File No. 5701).

In terms of teaching contents, depending on the school, discipline and type of training, the schools designed appropriate subjects and curriculums in the fields of Social Sciences, Humanities, Experimental Sciences, Theology, etc. Although the curriculum was at the discretion of each school, but the organization of examination, degree awarding and any new initiatives or projects must be approved by Ministry of Education before being implemented (Ministry of Education, ROV 1967, File No. 5701).

It can be seen that until the 1960s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the curriculum and teaching methods of higher education system in South Vietnam still simulated the French model, which is strong in theoretical knowledge and weak in science and technology with classical teaching methods.

Kasptein, an American professor who used to teach at Sai Gon University said: "I found that this mechanical recording of knowledge (by students) is a type of education at universities, where students note down every word of their professors and expect that the answers in final exams will be exactly the same. Student are too passive - they only write down lectures and learn them by heart, or their professor will tell them to buy and read his book and write every word in it into their exams without any changes, because 'that's the best book and what's written in there cannot be found anywhere'" (Nguyen Van Trung 1967, p. 88). Regarding contents of education, "the curriculum has yet any comprehensive reforms. Vietnam is a poor and underdeveloped country which is suffering from a fierce war. It needs an education that is suitable to the circumstances of the country instead of copying the already available model of the French" (Nguyen Quynh Giao 1969, p. 17). Due to the heavy influence of French philosophy of comprehensive education, the curriculum of many universities was still all over the place and focused heavily on basic knowledge. The depth of knowledge had not been properly paid attention. At higher education level, despite the addition of more applied certificates, the curriculum was still theory-oriented. It biased general and theoretical subjects and focused less on professional and practical ones.

## Reception of the Influence of American Higher Education in 1965-1975

### Factors affecting the Transformation of Higher Education in South Vietnam

From 1965, the sociopolitical situation in South Vietnam had had many changes. The war that the US was waging in Vietnam was getting fiercer. To implement war strategies in South Vietnam, the US sent tens of thousands of expeditionary troops and allied troops to South Vietnam; at the same time, it spent tens of billions of dollars on the Vietnam War in order to destroy revolutionary forces, stabilize South Vietnam and continue with its conspiracy to turn the land into an American new-style colony.

In the field of culture and education, with the goal of "understanding psychological characteristics, sentiments, customs and tastes of Vietnamese people in order to be able to appropriately disseminate American culture" (Phong Hien 1978, p. 172), the US further provided for the ROV government to win the "hearts and minds" of people in the South. It granted many scholarship to Vietnamese students, and organized for lecturers and managing officers of universities in South Vietnam to attend short-term and long-term training courses in the US. In addition, it also sent delegations of university advisers to Vietnam to study, work and propose projects to support the reforms of higher education institutions in South Vietnam (ROV Council for Culture and Education 1971, File No. 07). A report in 1964 said that, there were about 127 Vietnamese students attended training courses in the US and were awarded the degree of B.A (Bachelor of Arts) or B.S (Bachelor of Sciences), 45 had M.A (Master) degree and 35 had Ph.D (Doctor of Philosophy) degree (Doan Viet Hoat 1971, p. 269-270). By 1968, the number of Southern students and

officers studying in the US was 4,809 (Doan Viet Hoat 1972, p. 87). In 1969, the US offered a scholarship program of about 2,385,000 USD to Vietnam (Doan Viet Hoat 1971, p. 269). With this program, thousands of Vietnamese students and some lecturers and administrative officers of the ROV were sponsored to study in the US and some other countries.

In addition, many managing officers and lecturers of Universities were also sent to observe training model and attend short-term training courses in the US and other countries. By 1970, "most Chancellors and Deans of five Universities in South Vietnam have visited and observed models of higher education in the US" (Phong Hien 1984, p. 90). Programs for students to study abroad and for education administrators of the ROV to visit and study in the US all aimed to have more university professors in South Vietnam that know how to manage educational activities according to the American model (Doan Viet Hoat 1972, p. 89). According to many researchers, "by approving this training program, the US defeated the French influence, and especially, it provided the ROV administration with a nucleus of American trained personnel" (Tran Ngoc Dinh 1975, p. 21). Especially, when the Cultural Cooperation Treaty signed between the government of the State of Vietnam and France expired, the ROV government showed its intention to break the links of culture and education with the French. In this context, higher education in South Vietnam in 1965-1975 shifted from being influenced by French model to approaching and being influenced by the American one.

### The Transition in Structure

Since 1965, previously founded Universities in South Vietnam (Sai Gon University and Hue University) were restructured; at the same time, there was the introduction of several new educational institutions.

In 1966, *Can Tho University* was established with 4 faculties: Science, Law and Social Sciences; Pedagogy and Literature (Ngo Minh Oanh 2020, p. 39). Can Tho University was founded with the aim of attaching higher education to the local practical development program, which proved that higher education in South Vietnam during this period demonstrated its dynamics and shifted to associate higher education with the reality of people's lives. This was a new turning point for higher education in South Vietnam to start to follow the trend of American higher education (Pham Thi Phuong 2010, p. 81).

On March 29, 1973, *Thu Duc Polytechnic University* was established. This institution took after the model of US California Polytechnic State University as a multidisciplinary university which focused on practical fields of study that were needed by the economy in Sai Gon and neighboring provinces. At first, Thu Duc Polytechnic University consisted of schools of Agriculture, Engineering, Education, Science, Humanities, Economics, Administration and Urban Design. These schools were concentrated in a large campus, creating a favorable environment and inducing scientific spirit for intellectuals with a model designed to enhance the creativity of professors and students (Ngo Minh Oanh 2020, p. 39). The birth of Thu Duc Polytechnic University had the new characteristics of a

polytechnic university and marked a change in technical and professional education with the process of restructuring post-secondary and vocational schools in the higher education of the ROV government. For the first time, there was a university in South Vietnam that did not follow the model of faculties similar to Sai Gon University (Dac Lo Department of Psychology and Career 1974, p. 163).

A new characteristic in the structure of higher education in South Vietnam in this period was the establishment of *community colleges*, including: Tien Giang Community College (founded in 1971 in Dinh Tuong); Duyen Hai Community College (founded in 1971 in Khanh Hoa); Quang Da Public University (founded in 1974); Regina Pacis College for female students, established by the Christian Church following the model of community college (Ngo Minh Oanh 2020, p. 42). Community college is a model originated from the US which provides preliminary and multidisciplinary training courses of 2 years. After graduating from these colleges, students can advance to major universities, or expand their professional knowledge to work. Community colleges were established with the participation, contribution, construction and administration of localities in order to meet local development requirements in terms of culture, society and economy (Ngo Minh Oanh 2020, p. 41). These schools focused on training professions associated with localities, such as: Agriculture, fishery, economic management, etc., and had been useful in training professionals of many industries, in line with local developments (Do Ba Khe 1972). ROV higher education policy makers at that time believed that: "Community college is the combination of classical university and post-secondary school, where the future masters will study under one roof and practice democracy at the school to later build a fair society" (Do Ba Khe 1972). Later, many localities in South Vietnam also intended to establish community colleges, but their plans went down with the fall of ROV government (1975).

In addition, in the structure of public higher education in South Vietnam in 1965-1975, there was also the introduction of military schools with two prominent names: Vietnam National School of Martial Arts and School of Political War. The goal of military schools was to train military personnel to serve the needs of the American war in South Vietnam. In addition, most post-secondary schools and vocational schools previously founded were reformed in terms of training expertise, and some were renamed. At the same time, there was a number of new post-secondary and vocational schools that followed the trend of training in association with social practices.

### Organization and Management

In 1965, along with the policy of establishing a government on the model of Western democracy, the educational management mechanism of ROV government gradually changed, with decentralization clearly shown in the organization and management structure of higher education. From 1973, Ministry of Education became a multidisciplinary management agency called Ministry of Culture, Education and Youth. At the same time, in the organizational structure, ministerial agencies also no longer directly managed Universities or professional training

institutions as in the previous period, but instead managed them indirectly through Higher Education Office (Ministry of Culture, Education and Youth 1974, File No. 2615, p. 89).

In addition, in order to create a decentralization mechanism, the ROV government also established the National Council for Higher Education Development. The “*Regulations on national higher education*” promulgated by the President of the Republic of Vietnam on March 1970 identified the organizational structure of the higher education system in South Vietnam. Accordingly, higher education was placed under the direction of the National Council for Higher Education Development with Vice President in charge of social-cultural affairs as Chairman and Minister of Education as General Secretary, and 9 members being Minister of Finance, Minister of National Planning and Development, Chairman of Culture, Education and Youth Committee under House of Representatives, representative of Culture and Education Council, representative of Economy - Society Council, Chancellor of a public University and Chancellor of a private University. The council's missions were making policies for the development of higher education and determining annual funding for higher education institutions. The regulations clearly stated: “advising the government in planning and implementing policies of culture and education; presenting initiatives and drafting plans for cultural and educational affairs;... with the approval of the Congress, Culture and Education Council can give opinions on bills relating to culture and education, or send representatives to present to the Congress on related issues” (ROV Council for Culture and Education 1974, p. 11). With the establishment of the National Council for Education, the ROV government managed education by dividing powers between law enforcement and policy advising and making.

Although Ministry of Education still played the role of general coordinator between universities for the consistence of educational philosophy and the management of staff and finance, the model of autonomous university in terms of organization and management of higher education in South Vietnam had been increasingly emphasized and stipulated in the Constitution of the ROV in 1967. University autonomy represents the relationship between universities and the state, which is the independence of universities of the control of the state in its operations. University autonomy does not mean that universities have complete freedom, but that they are always within the framework limited by laws and agreements between the state, the higher education sector and each university. Before 1967, higher education in South Vietnam had almost no autonomy; however, from 1967, in the process of going autonomous, Southern universities had enjoyed many administrative and financial incentives (Le Xuan Khoa 2014). Proposals of governing boards regarding personnel or budget were generally approved quickly by the government, except for very important decisions. Due to the available credibility of university leaders, government approval was based on administrative validity and capacity of the budget rather than the needs and value of the proposal.

Thus, in terms of structure, from 1965 to 1975, there had been a process of restructuring technical post-secondary and vocational schools in South Vietnam, which led to a new

higher education model, namely Thu Duc Polytechnic University - the first polytechnic university whose characteristics are essentially different from French-modeled universities in the previous period. Another new feature in the public higher education system of this period was the introduction of American-style community colleges.

### Training Programs and Methods

From 1965, universities in South Vietnam entered a transition period in terms of training programs and methods towards being more flexible, multidisciplinary and especially more associated with the practice. This trend aimed to overcome the traits of the French education model which is theoretically heavy and shift to the popular, practical and specialized education trend of the US. In this period, universities emphasized that “teaching must focus on both theory and practice, so that students will not be taken by surprise when leaving the school and entering the society” (Dac Lo Department of Psychology and Career 1974, p. 163). Until the early 1970s, the strategy for comprehensive reform of higher education was set out by the ROV government as follows: Moving from the classic European stereotype of university to follow the American model, in order to reduce unnecessary costs; going in harmony with the university standards of neighboring countries in the Pacific region; training specialists at intermediate and advanced levels according to national development needs; encouraging the establishment of community colleges and the investment of private sector, with a focus on science and practicality (Pham Dinh Thang 1972, p. 9). The 1971 Education Policy of the ROV government clearly stated: The critical and multi-dimensional mission of higher education includes: Promoting national culture; training leaders and specialists for all industries; appraising innovating research and promoting necessary cultural, scientific and technical knowledge for development and progress. Collaborating with international universities and researchers to appropriately contribute to the cultural treasure of humanity, creating real dialogues between cultures of the world towards building a true and sustainable peace. However, in the current period, it is necessary to focus heavily on social reform and economic development, the latter must be prioritized to promptly train the necessary officials” (ROV Council for Culture and Education 1971, File No.07, p. 37). With that view, from 1970 onwards, higher education in South Vietnam focused on practical disciplines for mass service, especially economics. In fact, the birth of community colleges and polytechnic universities had brought to higher education of the ROV in this stage more specific and practice-related training objectives.

Although the training systems of *certificate* và *academic year* were still applied, from the academic year of 1970-1971, the *academic credit syste* of American higher education was deployed at some public universities and schools in South Vietnam, such as: Can Tho University, School of Law, School of Agriculture, School of Education, School of Basic Sciences, School of Pedagogy (Hue), Thu Duc Polytechnic University and community colleges. In the credit system, students can freely pursue subjects they are interested in and get the right qualifications. According to

the educators at that time: "This is a new reform that is very convenient for the studies of students" (Pham Thi Phuong 2010, p. 64).

Regarding curriculum, subjects in this period were not put in frame or impacted by the same stringent regulations as in the previous period, but were always adjusted and updated to ensure that students have access to new and practical scientific knowledge that are associated with the real world. Learners can freely choose between certificate system and credit system to match their study plan. The training contents of universities in this period were also more practical. Prof. Doan Viet Hoat, who used to teach in the higher education system in South Vietnam at that time, said: "Some subjects and teaching methods in some schools have been clearly influenced by American education" (Doan Viet Hoat 1971, p. 363). Regarding the curriculum of social sciences in South Vietnam: "among 30 bachelor's degree certificates, only five of them are related to Vietnamese culture, the other two are slightly related, and three quarters of the rest are about the culture of America, Britain, France, etc. Classes that teach subjects about Vietnam only account for one-fifth of total classes of (Sai Gon University)" (Saigon University 1966, p. 201-202).

In addition to the classical method of lecturing, which was still used in imparting knowledge to students, in universities, especially in disciplines that are associated with practice, lecturers and students applied new and more diverse teaching and learning methods, such as: presentation and discussion; team work; research and practice, etc. In which, the internship was commonly applied in schools of Pedagogy, Medicine, Administration, Pharmacy, Social Works, etc. Students were sent to public administrative agencies and actually worked under the guidance of leaders of the agency. This was an opportunity for students to "really lay their hands on administrative works, and at the same time observe the organization and working style in the administrative office and compare theory with the experience gained during practice" (Dac Lo Department of Psychology and Career 1974, p. 616). For medical schools, internship in laboratories or hospitals was compulsory. If students were absent 3 times during the internship at hospitals, they will be banned from taking exams. For pharmacy students, in addition to regular exercises, there were also practical internships, such as: Internship at Emergency Department or in pharmacies, etc. Obviously, the imprint of pragmatism and reality in American higher education philosophy had quickly appeared in the curriculum of many universities in South Vietnam.

Thus, the objectives, programs and methods of higher education in South Vietnam in this period had shifted to being closer to practice, changing from the French model which heavily focused on general theory to the popular American trend which focused on practical disciplines, especially economics, in the direction of specialization in order to serve the masses. From 1971, universities tended to follow the academic credit system of American higher education. In addition to lecturing, there had been new, diverse and practical teaching and learning methods for practical disciplines. The regime of autonomous university had been increasingly highlighted. These are the manifestations to show that the influence of American

higher education on higher education of the ROV government in South Vietnam was increasing.

## Conclusion

Higher education in South Vietnam in 1956-1975 had basic characteristics associated with the historical and political context of South Vietnam, as well as the specific context of its movement. It was an education in the context of war and was strongly influenced by war circumstances. The basic characteristic of higher education in South Vietnam is that it was mainly influenced by external factors, namely French and American education. In nearly 20 years of existence, it had changed in terms of structure, contents and methods of training, which was demonstrated through two distinct stages.

In the first stage of 1956-1964, although being dominated by the US in terms of politics, aid and consultation, the government of the Republic of Vietnam still had initial pilots of building universities in South Vietnam on the model of American higher education. However, due to the obligations in the culture and education treaty signed with France, and the fact that the educational foundations left by the French were not easy to be changed and that the ROV government in its early stage was unable to build a higher education system with its own identity, etc., the French model of higher education still had a profound influence on the structure as well as the training programs and methods in South Vietnam. During this period, universities in South Vietnam had expanded, with the addition of Hue University and some private schools. Nonetheless, characteristics of contents, teaching methods, etc. still remained almost the same as those of French universities, despite the fact that French education itself had also made certain changes. From 1965, as the war waged by the US in South Vietnam escalated, the US advocated developing capitalist relations in order to bring the South into a capitalist economic trajectory by means of economic aid. In order to have human resources for the development of capitalism in the South and for the invasion, the US defined the goal of helping the ROV government to form a contingent of intellectuals in science and technology. This contingent can only be formed through an American higher education model. Therefore, higher education in South Vietnam had clearly transformed and shifted to the US education model. This was the goal and also the consequence of American policies in South Vietnam.

Despite its shortcomings, the higher education model in South Vietnam still provides many useful lessons that need to be adequately researched, in order to be selectively inherited and continued. In which, there is the reception of influence from two models of French and American education. In the process of reforming higher education in Vietnam, especially when it is facing many difficult problems in the current period, learning from and adopting values of advanced higher education models is also inevitable.

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