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A comparative study on educational philosophies of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey: values, differences, and potentials for integration in Vietnam's educational reform

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Abstract---In the context of Vietnam's ongoing educational reform, comparing major educational philosophies provides a crucial foundation for strategic orientation. Hồ Chí Minh, with his humanistic philosophy emphasizing holistic human development, and John Dewey, a representative of Western experimental education, have laid down two distinct yet influential value systems from the East and the West. This paper analyzes and compares their core values, identifies fundamental differences, and evaluates the potential integration of their strengths into Vietnam's educational transformation. The study highlights not only their shared commitment to learner-centered and holistic education but also the complementary nature and tensions between the two traditions when applied in practice. Accordingly, the paper proposes solutions to build a modern, democratic, and creative Vietnamese education system rooted in national identity and international integration.

Keywords---Hồ Chí Minh, John Dewey, educational reform, educational values, philosophical differences.

Introduction

Education, as a key driving force behind social development, always reflects the core values of each culture and historical period. Every major turning point in human history has been associated with the emergence and spread of pioneering educational philosophies. Within that trajectory, Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey stand out as two prominent representatives of two distinct yet influential educational-philosophical traditions: Hồ Chí Minh embodies the humanistic spirit



of the East and the aspiration for national modernization, while John Dewey symbolizes Western experimentalism, democratic reform, and liberalism.

The comparison of these two ideologies not only aims to identify commonalities in their orientation toward comprehensive human development, but also to clarify fundamental differences in educational philosophy from Hồ Chí Minh's views on morality, social responsibility, and collective will to Dewey's emphasis on democracy, critical thinking, and individual autonomy. More importantly, the comparative analysis will reveal the potential to integrate these outstanding values into the process of educational reform in Vietnam, a process that demands reconciliation between tradition and modernity, between the individual and the community, between theory and practice.

Hồ Chí Minh's ideology of "cultivating people" emphasizes education as a path to shaping character, virtue, and capacity for the new generation, placing the learner at the center and promoting the harmonious development of both intellect and morality. Meanwhile, John Dewey criticized passive traditional education and built the model of the school as a miniature society, where learners actively experience, experiment, reflect, and cooperate in order to grow.

Comparative Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper focuses on contrasting and comparing the philosophical foundations of education in the thought of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey, aiming to identify converging values, differences, as well as the potential for integration within the context of Vietnam's educational reform.

Clarifying the educational philosophical foundations of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey requires not only an approach from historical and cultural perspectives but also a restructuring of their ideological systems in terms of the nature, objectives, and methods of education in the 21st century. Although these two ideologies originated in different socio-historical contexts, placing them in comparative relation reveals not only convergences in both theoretical and practical aspects but also essential differences, thereby opening prospects for multidimensional integration in the strategy for developing modern Vietnamese education.

First, Hồ Chí Minh's educational philosophy is built on the foundation of revolutionary humanism, emphasizing the role of education in the cause of national liberation, national development, and the construction of a new socialist person. For Hồ Chí Minh, education is not merely a process of knowledge transmission but also a system of cultural and moral values, an endogenous force for the comprehensive development of human beings in terms of morality, intellect, physical well-being, and aesthetics. Hồ Chí Minh stressed the principle of "cultivating people," placing human development at the center, promoting self-study, creativity, and the aspiration to contribute to the nation. His conception of education aims toward the unification of theory and practice, intellectual work and manual labor, individual and society. In other words, Hồ Chí Minh proposed a theoretical framework for an education "connected to life, serving the people" both inheriting Eastern traditions and absorbing the cultural quintessence of humanity.

At the other end of the ideological spectrum, John Dewey's educational philosophy is constructed on the foundation of pragmatism, prioritizing the outcomes of ideas and emphasizing the role of practical experience in the formation of knowledge. John Dewey criticized the traditional "transmission-reception" educational model, considering it a major barrier to the development of critical thinking and learners' adaptive capacities. Instead, he proposed a "learning by doing" model, stressing that learners must actively engage in practical experiences, problem-solving, experimentation, and reflection in order to construct new knowledge for themselves. Dewey did not see education merely as a tool for serving society, but also as an environment for personal development, nurturing democratic spirit, fostering active participation in the community, and promoting continuous innovation and creativity.

The nature of the interaction between these two educational ideologies, when placed in comparative analysis, not only highlights their multidimensional complementary values but also shapes an integrated theoretical framework: if Hồ Chí Minh emphasizes moral foundations, community responsibility, and social cohesion, then John Dewey emphasizes democracy, individualization, critical thinking, and creativity. The fusion of collective humanism and democratic pragmatism opens a new direction for Vietnamese education: simultaneously preserving traditional values (community consciousness, morality, resilience) and actively adapting modern elements (critical thinking, adaptability, creativity, and democratic schooling).

According to John Dewey, education can be envisioned as a "social laboratory" where moral values and practical experiences are tested, adjusted, and developed through specific situations, in the continuous interaction between the individual, the collective, and the environment. Compared with Hồ Chí Minh, the convergence here lies in the notion of "education connected to life," but the difference lies in the emphasis: Dewey leans toward individual creativity and social innovation through experimentation, while Hồ Chí Minh emphasizes moral values and collective ideals. This approach allows us to move beyond the traditional framework of "knowledge transmission" to build an integrated educational ideology that promotes comprehensive development in cognition, character, life skills, and active social participation.

At the same time, applying this integrated theoretical framework requires caution against the risk of one-sided extremism: If education leans solely toward training in morality, discipline, and community responsibility while neglecting independent thinking and individual creativity, it leads to conservatism and stagnation. Conversely, if it emphasizes individual freedom and formal democracy while ignoring foundational traditional values and community consciousness, education risks falling into a state of "cultural alienation," breaking national identity and social responsibility. Therefore, the comparative and integrative analysis here is the only solution to simultaneously promote both value streams, ensuring a balanced and flexible adaptation between morality, creativity, social responsibility, and individual autonomy.

Comparative Research Methodology

This study employs a comparative method based on original texts, combining critical interpretation and interdisciplinary integration to clarify converging values, identify differences, and establish the practical potential for integration between the educational philosophies of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey in the context of Vietnamese educational reform.

The research is conducted using qualitative methods combined with comparative–interpretative analysis to clarify the depth of educational thought in Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey in connection with contemporary Vietnamese educational practice. The central objective is to contrast and identify convergences and differences, and to evaluate the potential integration of core values from both ideological systems, thereby laying a scientific and humanistic foundation for the process of renewing Vietnam’s education system.

The primary data sources for this study include Hồ Chí Minh’s key writings, speeches, and letters to officials, students, and teachers on occasions such as school openings, inauguration ceremonies, and political education classes, as well as John Dewey’s seminal works (*Democracy and Education*, *Experience and Education*, etc.). In parallel, international studies, critiques, and syntheses on Hồ Chí Minh’s and John Dewey’s educational philosophies are also referenced as important supplementary materials to deepen the theoretical analysis.

The textual analysis process in this research is carried out in multiple layers, starting with interpretative analysis, focusing on semantic explanation, internal logic, and the philosophical, historical, and social implications behind each idea. The analysis does not stop at semantics but situates arguments within specific historical contexts to identify the cultural, political, and social forces that shaped each thinker’s educational philosophy. The interpretative method is applied consistently: the meaning of a text is understood as the result of interaction between author, reader, and context, whereby each deeper layer of meaning is uncovered and validated through intertextual and interdisciplinary comparison.

Next, the study directly compares and contrasts core viewpoints, principles, pedagogical methods, and educational models of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey, focusing on categories such as: the philosophy of “learner-centeredness,” the connection between education and life, the role of experience, community ethics, democracy, and critical thinking. This approach continuously emphasizes points of convergence, difference, and integrative potential, while also identifying potential conflicts, thereby proposing integrated models that adapt to the requirements of Vietnam’s educational development.

The research actively applies critical interpretive methods, combined with modern techniques to transform complex concepts into accessible academic language. Arguments are rigorously tested through the lens of global and Vietnamese educational realities, in interdisciplinary dialogue (education, philosophy, sociology) to broaden intellectual scope and avoid falling into dogmatism or one-sided imposition.

To ensure practical relevance, the study also incorporates case study analysis of certain Vietnamese educational models that have applied or experimented with the spirit of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey. This process helps clarify adaptability, success and failure factors, and draws valuable lessons for ongoing educational reform. Data and evaluations from international reports, field observations, and interviews with experts, teachers, and students are also referenced to provide a comprehensive and practically grounded picture.

All analyses, comparisons, and interpretations in the study are based on critical thinking, valuing objectivity, logic, and creativity, while also respecting Vietnamese cultural identity in the context of international integration. The author's personal perspective is not excluded from the analysis but is integrated as a dialogical component to enhance criticality, multidimensionality, and the capacity to generate new knowledge.

In short, by taking comparison and contrast as the central axis combined with qualitative analysis, interpretation, criticism, and integration, this study aims to construct a solid academic reference framework, both inheriting the essence of Hồ Chí Minh's and John Dewey's educational philosophies and promoting innovation in the development of Vietnamese education in the 21st century.

Results and Discussion

This section directly approaches the spirit of comparison between the educational philosophies of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey, emphasizing converging values, essential differences, while also analyzing in depth the potential for integrating their principles into the modernization of Vietnamese education. Each argument focuses on clearly identifying comparative dimensions, value layers, and integration prospects to establish a solid academic and practical foundation for comprehensive and fundamental reform.

Foundational Converging Value: Learner-Centeredness and Education for Comprehensive Human Development

When placing Hồ Chí Minh's and John Dewey's educational philosophies within a comparative framework, the most profound intersection is their affirmation of the learner's central role and the goal of comprehensive human development. This serves as the core nucleus that defines both the progressive and enduringly humanistic character of each ideology.

Entering the 21st century, as traditional educational value systems reveal numerous limitations amid constant societal changes, the search for shared foundational values among major ideologies becomes a prerequisite for educational reform. Within this current, Hồ Chí Minh's and John Dewey's philosophies, though emerging from distinct cultural and historical spaces, deeply converge at a key point: affirming the student as the center and pursuing education for holistic human development.

In Hồ Chí Minh's philosophy, "placing the learner at the center" is not merely a pedagogical principle but the guiding thread running through all educational

activities. Hồ Chí Minh repeatedly emphasized: “For the sake of ten years, plant trees; for the sake of a hundred years, cultivate people,” indicating that education is not simply the transmission of knowledge but a process of nurturing and developing individual character. For him, every student possesses unique value and must be respected and developed according to their abilities, circumstances, and personal aspirations. Hồ Chí Minh opposed all forms of imposed education that homogenize students into a “mold,” and instead emphasized individualization and the maximization of each learner’s potential. The ultimate goal of education, according to him, is to shape autonomous, creative individuals who know how to live, work, and contribute to the nation.

Correspondingly, in John Dewey’s philosophy, the core lies in shifting education from a “knowledge transmission model” to one of “constructing lived experience,” centering the educational process on active participation and the development of learners’ practical capacities. John Dewey viewed the school as a miniature society where students not only acquire knowledge but also learn to participate, interact, and solve real life problems. His concept of “learning by doing” places the learner at the center of educational experience, emphasizing initiative, engagement, and creativity in knowledge acquisition. According to Dewey, the teacher’s role is no longer a one-way “knowledge transmitter,” but becomes a guide, a companion, and a facilitator of environments for learners to explore, experiment, and grow.

This shift in the teacher’s role from a “center of authority” to a “supporter” marks a turning point in both ideologies. Under Hồ Chí Minh’s influence, teachers must be moral exemplars modeling integrity while also being approachable, empathetic, and respectful of each student. In Dewey’s educational philosophy, teachers create conditions for learners to actively ask questions, participate in projects, practice critical thinking, and thereby develop individual competencies and adaptability to modern society.

From this convergence, it can be concluded: The foundational view of “learner-centeredness” and education aimed at comprehensive development is the common denominator between Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey. It serves as the theoretical basis guiding all modern reforms that seek balance between knowledge, individual character, and community values.

Complementary Values and Integration: Connecting Practice, Social Ethics, and the Development of Action Competence

In a deeper comparative perspective, the value complementarity between the two educational ideologies is most clearly reflected in the integration of “education linked to practical life” (Hồ Chí Minh) and “education through experience and experimentation” (John Dewey), laying the groundwork for the harmonious development of individual capacities and community consciousness.

In the history of Vietnamese education, the problems of “superficial learning” and the “achievement disease” have created a vicious cycle that undermines the substantive meaning of education. Learning merely to obtain grades, degrees, or to meet formal assessment criteria has detached the educational process from

real life needs and weakened its ethical foundation. As a result, learners are not sufficiently equipped with problem-solving capabilities, lack intrinsic motivation, and gradually drift away from the ideal of contributing to society.

In this context, Hồ Chí Minh's educational viewpoint of "learning in tandem with practice" stands out as a revolutionary perspective. He affirmed that learning cannot be separated from labor, production, and daily life. According to Hồ Chí Minh, the ultimate goal of education is not only to "learn to know" but also to "learn to do" and "learn to serve the Nation and Humanity." Education must help form citizens who possess both knowledge and moral integrity to be capable of connecting learning to action and expressing a sense of social responsibility. Hồ Chí Minh repeatedly emphasized the necessity of education being closely tied to practice, opposing all manifestations of superficial learning, learning for show, and detachment from community and national concerns.

The point of convergence with Dewey lies in the idea that "education cannot be separated from life; it must occur through real experience and develop critical thinking and adaptability in a dynamic environment." John Dewey did not see the school as a mere place for knowledge transmission but as a "miniature society" where students experience, engage with real world problems, and learn through action and projects. For Dewey, education is a continuous process of "learning by doing," through which learners develop critical thinking, cooperation, and adaptability to the complexities of modern society.

The integration of these two values opens the way for a multidimensional educational approach: shifting from purely theoretical instruction to a model of "project-based learning," experiential education, and the simultaneous development of practical skills and social ethics. This is the core orientation for Vietnam's educational reform that consistently focuses on linking knowledge, action, and community responsibility.

Complementary Differences: Community Ethics – Democracy – Critical Thinking

A comparative analysis of the educational philosophies of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey reveals that the two major value systems are not only different but also mutually reinforcing, forming the foundation for an integrated educational model with high adaptability to the modern era. At the level of identity, Hồ Chí Minh regarded morality and community responsibility as pillars, emphasizing that education must primarily shape character, a spirit of service, cooperation, and dedication to society. For him, education was a tool for building a united and sustainable society; the ideal person is one who is "both virtuous and talented," morally upright and professionally competent, ready to sacrifice personal interests for the common good.

In contrast, John Dewey built his educational philosophy on democratic foundations, valuing personal autonomy, critical thinking, and creativity. Dewey did not view teachers as passive transmitters of knowledge, but rather as facilitators who create environments where students can actively debate,

experiment, and develop independent thought. Only through the freedom of critique can individuals truly mature and contribute to social progress.

These differences are not contradictory but complementary poles that help an integrated educational model avoid both extreme individualism and collective assimilation. Community ethics serve as a “moral compass” guiding collective action, while democracy and critical thinking are the driving forces for personal development and innovation.

Experiences from advanced countries like Japan, South Korea, and Finland demonstrate that successful educational models skillfully combine the cultivation of moral character and cooperation with the development of critical and creative thinking. This is the direction that Vietnamese education should selectively adopt, localize, and creatively apply to nurture a generation with both “heart” and “vision,” capable of integrating globally without losing national identity.

Intersection in Method: Experience – Experimentation – Competency Development

The convergence between Hồ Chí Minh’s and John Dewey’s educational philosophies is most prominent in their methodology: placing practical experience and experimentation at the core of personal development. If John Dewey laid the foundation for the philosophy of “learning through doing,” emphasizing the learner’s active role in constructing knowledge through experience, then Hồ Chí Minh had long advocated for “learning in tandem with action,” viewing education as the seamless combination of theory and labor, school and social life.

Both thinkers rejected passive and purely theoretical education models, instead aiming to build a flexible learning ecosystem where individuals develop capabilities through vibrant real-world engagement. For Dewey, the school is a “miniature society” where students not only acquire knowledge but also solve real life situations, develop critical thinking, and cooperate. Modern models such as project-based learning, STEM, interdisciplinary instruction, and vocational education are concrete embodiments of this philosophy: shifting from traditional teaching and learning toward experiential construction, performance-based assessment, and problem-solving competence in an ever-changing context.

As for Hồ Chí Minh, the teacher is not merely a transmitter of knowledge but a “soul engineer”—a guide who inspires moral values, awakens potential, and sparks intrinsic motivation in learners. The goal of education is not only to “learn to know” but “learn to be,” closely tying learning to community service, career development, and personal fulfillment within a diverse social environment. This is the spirit of integration linking school to life, theory to action, and fostering holistic development in intellect, morality, physique, and aesthetics.

In Vietnam, experiential educational models such as STEM, project-based learning, and career-oriented programs are increasingly being implemented, expanding learning spaces beyond traditional classrooms. However, for these methods to be truly effective, a flexible educational ecosystem is needed, one in which learners actively explore, teachers creatively facilitate, and communities

actively support. Only then can the experiential and experimental lessons of Dewey and Hồ Chí Minh form a solid foundation for comprehensive reform, enabling Vietnamese education to integrate globally while preserving national identity.

Conflicts and Challenges in Integration

The integration of the two major ideological systems from those of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey into the reality of Vietnamese education inevitably faces theoretical and practical conflicts. Vietnam's education system has long been influenced by Confucian legacies, the Soviet model, and a tradition of formalism and achievement-oriented thinking, all of which have created entrenched barriers to reform. The mindset of "learning to take exams," the obsession with degrees, and old-fashioned collective management have obscured space for personal creativity, causing stagnation and slowing down the modernization of education. A notable risk in applying Deweyan models such as democracy, autonomy, and experiential learning is the danger of superficial replication without substantive change, leading to a "new wine in old bottles" situation. Without cultural adaptation, reforms may remain slogans without penetrating the classroom, teacher-student relationships, or the evaluation system. Conversely, an overemphasis on collectivist values or strict adherence to tradition, such as the Soviet model, may suppress individual development and result in homogenization and a lack of innovation.

The greatest challenge of integrated education lies in balancing personal development with the preservation of communal ethics. Overemphasizing individual freedom while neglecting moral foundations can push education toward extreme individualism, severing social cohesion. On the other hand, focusing too heavily on collective values without innovation can lead to inertia and an inability to adapt to the pace of the digital and globalized era. In the context of intensified internationalization, the risk of losing national identity or becoming overly reliant on foreign models is a persistent challenge if philosophical selectivity is absent.

The solution is creative integration in the spirit of critical reflection without idealizing Western models nor rigidly clinging to local conservatism. This process requires educators to possess a deep understanding of Vietnamese tradition, an open mindset, and a willingness to experiment and localize new values. Above all, integration must place the learner at the center, creating a multidimensional educational ecosystem in which creativity and social responsibility coexist and evolve in harmony. This is the key to transforming all conflicts into momentum for fundamental and comprehensive reform.

Strategic Lessons and Recommendations

The integration of Hồ Chí Minh's and John Dewey's educational philosophies into Vietnamese education reform clearly reflects a global trend of East-West value convergence to build an adaptive, flexible, and modern educational model. International experiences from Japan, South Korea, and Singapore show that successful education systems are not those that mechanically copy Western

models but those that distill traditional values, innovate methods, and encourage personal creativity within a framework of community and national identity.

For example, Japan retains community values and ceremonial traditions but has strongly adopted experiential learning, STEM education, and multidimensional competency assessment. South Korea has shifted from rote learning to fostering creative thinking and problem-solving. Singapore has succeeded with an “integrated education” model focusing equally on life skills, critical thinking, and moral foundations. These practices highlight the synthesis of “convergent values” (tradition) and “innovative methods” (advancement), creating momentum for systemic transformation.

In Vietnam, models such as experiential activities, STEM education, project-based learning, and life skills training have gradually been introduced in general education, promoting self-learning, cooperation, critical thinking, and the connection between knowledge and real life. However, barriers such as inconsistent implementation, limited teacher capacity, formalistic achievement pressure, and undemocratic school environments remain significant challenges. International experience only proves effective when localized and adapted to Vietnam’s specific cultural and social contexts.

The core recommendation is to reform teacher training based on integrated East-West thinking, develop flexible curricula, and design democratic learning environments in which students, teachers, and parents co-create. All reforms must be grounded in the integration of local values with an open spirit, adjusted to each developmental phase, and aimed at the ultimate goal: human development in both individual and communal.

Development Orientation: An Integrated Axis for Vietnam’s Educational Strategy

The comparative analysis of Hồ Chí Minh’s and John Dewey’s educational thought highlights a value axis of integration: education must center on the human being, fostering the harmonious development of individual creativity, community consciousness, and moral foundations. This should be established as a guiding principle for all educational policies and practices in Vietnam in the new era. Rather than erasing tradition or mechanically copying Western models, Vietnamese education must proactively innovate, select, combine, and continuously evolve based on national identity, practical needs, and the community’s adaptive capacity.

At the national level, this integrated educational model should become the central orientation of the 21st century: policy, curriculum, governance, and pedagogy must place the learner as the subject, respect diversity, and nurture the aspiration for comprehensive development. Vietnamese education must actively engage with global knowledge, selectively absorb human intellectual heritage, and avoid the risks of assimilation or loss of core values. It is especially critical to be wary of superficial reforms and dogmatic idealization of philosophies when innovations exist only on paper, failing to reach the classroom and students’ lived experiences.

The long-term vision is to build an open, creative education system firmly grounded in Vietnamese identity, constantly adapting to each developmental stage. The focus must be on igniting self-learning and innovation while preserving moral values and civic responsibility. Only by developing through a flexible integration model that values individual competence while nurturing community character can Vietnamese education achieve sustainable global integration without being diluted, securing a proactive and enduring foundation for the country's future.

Conclusion

In the modernization process of Vietnamese education, the philosophies of Hồ Chí Minh and John Dewey, despite being shaped by entirely different historical, cultural, and social contexts, converge in their shared aspiration for the comprehensive development of the human being. Comparing these two systems of thought not only offers a multidimensional perspective on educational theory but also paves the way for practical integration strategies suited to the demands of educational reform in the era of globalization.

First and foremost, the comparative analysis highlights the core similarity between these thinkers: both Hồ Chí Minh and Dewey emphasize the central role of the learner, making personal development the axis of the educational process. Hồ Chí Minh underscored the ideal of “cultivating people,” focusing on nurturing morality, intellect, physical fitness, and aesthetics to build autonomous, creative individuals who are connected to their communities. Similarly, Dewey developed the theory of experiential education, viewing learning as a dynamic process in which students actively construct knowledge, develop practical skills, and cultivate democratic values.

However, the differences between their philosophies are also profound and serve to enrich the theoretical foundation of Vietnamese education. Rooted in Eastern humanistic traditions, Hồ Chí Minh's thought emphasizes moral cultivation, resilience, the importance of collective values, cultural identity, and community responsibility. In contrast, Dewey, inheriting Western pragmatism, highlights democracy, critical thinking, individual freedom, and learning through real life experience in a constantly changing society. This complementarity forms a “theoretical confluence” that provides a foundation for building an integrated educational model, harmonizing traditional and modern values.

The capacity to integrate these two value systems represents a strategic path forward for educational reform in Vietnam. Balancing foundational principles, preserving moral standards and communal awareness while embracing democracy, creativity, and experiential learning shall enable the construction of a flexible, comprehensive educational ecosystem that avoids one-sided extremism. This approach also implies that Vietnamese education must develop core competencies such as self-learning, independent thinking, adaptability, and innovation, while simultaneously safeguarding national identity, enhancing social responsibility, and promoting full civic competence.

From Vietnam's practical standpoint, the key lesson is not to mechanically replicate any philosophical model but to apply them creatively and flexibly, in accordance with the country's unique cultural and social conditions. Selectively combining the strengths of Hồ Chí Minh and Dewey offers a solid foundation for a democratic, humanistic, and modern educational system that is capable of addressing the challenges of the digital age and globalization, while cultivating a generation of creative, resilient, and socially responsible citizens.

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