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The Evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Educational Thinking During Doi Moi (1986–2026): An Analysis of the 6th–14th National Party Congress Documents

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training during the Đổi mới (Renovation) period (1986–2026) through an analysis of the Documents of the Sixth to the Fourteenth National Party Congresses. Adopting a historical policy perspective, the article employs content analysis, policy discourse analysis, and diachronic comparison to elucidate the transformation of the Party's educational policy across different stages of national development. The findings indicate that the Party's educational thinking evolved through four major phases: (1) education serving the Đổi mới process and national development (1986–1995); (2) education as the foremost national policy in support of industrialization and modernization (1996–2005); (3) fundamental and comprehensive educational reform, the development of high-quality human resources, and international integration (2006–2020); and (4) education integrated with science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation in a new era of national development (2021–2026). Despite continuous refinement and expansion, the Party's educational policy has consistently maintained its fundamental objective of promoting human development and national development. This study contributes to the systematic reconstruction of the evolution of the Party's educational thinking over four decades of Đổi mới, while enriching historical policy approaches to the study of education in Vietnam.

Keywords: Education and training, educational thinking, Policy history, National Party Congress

Introduction

Since the launch of the Đổi mới (Renovation) reforms in 1986, education and training have consistently been regarded by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) as a strategic pillar of national development. From addressing the socio-economic crisis during the early years of Đổi mới to the contemporary objectives of developing high-quality human resources, advancing science and technology, fostering innovation, and accelerating digital transformation, the Party's thinking on education and training has been continuously refined and expanded to respond to the evolving developmental needs of the country. Accordingly, education has gradually evolved from being viewed primarily as a means of improving educational

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attainment and training the workforce to becoming a key driver of sustainable development, national competitiveness, and international integration (Hac, 2002; Chau, 2007; CPV, 2021).

Over nearly four decades of Đổi mới, numerous studies have examined the development of Vietnam's education system from diverse perspectives, including educational reform, educational philosophy, educational governance, and higher education reform. The works of Hac (1991, 1996, 2002) laid the theoretical foundation for understanding the transformation of educational thinking in relation to human development and socio-economic development. Chau (2007) provided a comprehensive overview of the characteristics of Vietnamese education during the early years of the twenty-first century, while Phu (2005), Binh (2014), and Giang (2013) analyzed the imperative to renew educational thinking in response to the country's new development context and the growing trend toward international integration. More recently, Dung & Nhu (2025) synthesized the evolution of the Party's thinking on education and training during the period 1991–2021, thereby contributing to a clearer understanding of the development of the Party's educational policy throughout the Đổi mới era.

However, the existing literature has largely approached this issue from the perspectives of educational science or policy implementation, while systematic studies examining the evolution of the Party's educational thinking through the complete corpus of the National Party Congress Documents remain limited. The Political Reports presented at the Sixth through the Fourteenth National Party Congresses provide the most comprehensive reflection of the formulation, continuity, and evolution of the Party's educational policy, while also illustrating how its policy thinking has been adjusted in response to changing domestic and international contexts.

Against this backdrop, this article examines the evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training during the period 1986–2026 through an analysis of the Documents of the Sixth to the Fourteenth National Party Congresses. The study focuses on tracing the transformation of the Party's guiding perspectives—from viewing education as a means of serving the Đổi mới (Renovation) process, to defining education as the foremost national policy, and subsequently advancing toward the concept of fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training. More recently, this thinking has evolved toward the development of a modern, open, and internationally integrated education system closely linked to innovation, digital transformation, and the cultivation of high-quality human resources for the country's new era of development. In doing so, the article contributes to a systematic reconstruction of the evolution of the Party's educational thinking over nearly four decades of Đổi mới, while enriching the historical policy approach to the study of education in Vietnam.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a historical policy approach to examine the formation, continuity, and evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training during the Đổi mới (Renovation) period (1986–2026). This approach enables Party documents to be analyzed in relation to the economic, political, and social contexts of each historical period, thereby elucidating the evolution of the Party's leadership thinking on education and training. Unlike previous studies that primarily evaluate policy implementation or the developmental outcomes of Vietnam's education system (Hac, 2002; Chau, 2007), this research focuses on the process through which the Party's policy thinking has been refined and developed, as reflected in its official documents.

The study draws upon two categories of sources. Primary sources, which constitute the core body of evidence, include the Documents of the Sixth through the Fourteenth National Party Congresses (CPV, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021, 2026), together with major Party resolutions and conclusions on education and training, including the Resolution of the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Central Committee (Central Committee, 1996), Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW on the Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Education and Training (Central Committee, 2013), Conclusion No. 51-KL/TW (Central Committee, 2019), Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW on Breakthroughs in the Development of Science, Technology, Innovation, and National Digital Transformation (Politburo, 2024), and Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW on Breakthroughs in Education and Training Development (Politburo, 2025). These documents directly reflect the Party's perspectives, objectives, and strategic orientations for education during each stage of national development.

Secondary sources were employed to support the analysis and triangulate the research findings. These include scholarly monographs and journal articles on educational thinking, education policy, and the trajectory of educational reform in Vietnam (Central Committee for Science and Education, 2002; Hac, 1991, 1996, 2002; Quan, 1995; Chau, 2007; Giang, 2013; Dung & Nhu, 2025). These sources provide essential contextual insights into the formulation of educational policies while offering scholarly interpretations against which the content of Party documents can be systematically compared.

Methodologically, the study integrates the historical method, content analysis, and policy discourse analysis. The historical method is employed to periodize the evolution of the Party's educational thinking across successive stages of the Đổi mới (Renovation) process. Content analysis is used to identify the key concepts, objectives, and policy orientations that recur throughout the Party documents, whereas policy discourse analysis facilitates the examination of changes in policy language and conceptual frameworks, thereby revealing the evolution of the Party's

educational thinking over time. In addition, the study adopts diachronic comparison to compare the educational content of successive National Party Congress documents, thereby identifying both the continuity and the major developments in the Communist Party of Vietnam's educational policy during the period 1986–2026. This analytical framework provides the basis for identifying the underlying patterns governing the evolution of the Party's educational policy thinking over nearly four decades of Đổi mới.

Results

Education in Service of Đổi mới and National Development (1986–1995)

The period from 1986 to 1995 marked a foundational transformation in the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training. As the country transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a multi-sector commodity economy operating under a state-regulated market mechanism, education gradually ceased to be viewed primarily as a social welfare sector and instead came to be regarded as a strategic driver of the Đổi mới (Renovation) process and national development. This shift was clearly reflected in the Documents of the Sixth National Party Congress (1986) and was further elaborated and consolidated at the Seventh National Party Congress (1991), laying the foundation for subsequent educational reforms (CPV, 1986, 1991).

The Sixth National Party Congress took place against the backdrop of a prolonged socio-economic crisis, compelling the Party to renew its thinking across multiple policy domains, including education. The Political Report emphasized that educational development should be closely aligned with the country's socio-economic development objectives and the cultivation of human resources for the Đổi mới period. It stated that: "Educational development planning must be closely integrated with socio-economic development planning at both the local and national levels" (CPV, 1986). This marked the first time that education was explicitly positioned within the framework of the national development strategy, rather than being treated merely as an independent socio-cultural sector.

Concurrently, the Sixth National Party Congress identified the enhancement of human resource quality through curriculum reform as a key objective. The Congress called for "improving the quality of professional training and practical competencies while emphasizing political, ideological, ethical, legal, physical, and national defense education; integrating teaching and learning with productive labor, experimentation, and scientific research; and preparing young people for productive work and national defense while enabling them to understand and fulfill their civic responsibilities" (CPV, 1986). This perspective reflected a holistic educational philosophy aimed at developing individuals who possessed not only professional expertise but also political integrity and practical capabilities, thereby meeting the country's development needs under the new circumstances.

Another significant innovation introduced at the Sixth National Party Congress was the expansion of the concept of educational resources. The Political Report proposed that "in addition to the State budget, the contributions of ministries, local authorities, economic and social organizations, and families to the cause of education should be clearly defined; international cooperation in education should be promoted; and preparations should be made for the promulgation of the Education Law" (CPV, 1986). This constituted an early foundation for the policy of the socialization of education and the expansion of international cooperation in education, both of which were consistent with the country's broader reform agenda. It also reflected a shift away from a fully state-subsidized model toward mobilizing diverse societal resources to support educational development (Quan, 1995; Hac, 1996).

While the Sixth National Party Congress laid the groundwork for renewing educational thinking, the Seventh National Party Congress developed these ideas into a more coherent and comprehensive policy framework. For the first time, education was explicitly linked to science and technology. The Political Report affirmed that: "Science and education play a pivotal role in the entire endeavor of building socialism and defending the Fatherland; they constitute a driving force enabling the country to overcome poverty and backwardness and advance toward the world's higher levels of development" (CPV, 1991). This represented a significant advancement in the Party's thinking by recognizing knowledge and education as the foundation of national development, rather than merely instruments for fulfilling political objectives.

Building upon these foundations, the Seventh National Party Congress identified the central task for the 1991–1995 period as to "continue reforming, stabilizing, developing, and improving the quality of education and training," while introducing a series of reform orientations with long-term significance. The Political Report called for "greater emphasis on political and moral education for pupils and students; the gradual modernization of educational content and teaching methods; the democratization of schools and educational governance; the diversification of educational programs and school types; the gradual establishment of semi-public, people-founded, and private educational institutions; and the expansion of vocational education" (CPV, 1991). These policy directions laid the groundwork for the diversification of Vietnam's education system and the reform of educational governance throughout the 1990s.

The Seventh National Party Congress also placed particular emphasis on the role of education in developing high-quality human resources. The Political Report called for "cultivating large numbers of highly qualified personnel in science, technology, business, and economic and social management, as well as skilled workers; and improving the educational, scientific, and technical qualifications of the workforce." At the same time, it advocated expanding the scale of general, higher, and

postgraduate education, while increasing investment in mountainous areas and ethnic minority communities. The Report further stressed the need to "review the previous educational reform and prepare for a new educational reform aimed at developing an intellectually capable workforce suited to a commodity-based economy" (CPV, 1991). This clearly demonstrates that education had come to be positioned as a direct instrument for supporting the country's transition toward a new model of economic development.

Overall, the period from 1986 to 1995 represented the formative stage in the development of the Party's educational policy during the Đổi mới (Renovation) era. From the Sixth to the Seventh National Party Congress, the Party's thinking evolved from a primary concern with maintaining and developing the education system to recognizing education as a driving force for socio-economic development and as a decisive factor in enhancing the quality of human resources required for the country's economic and social progress. These perspectives not only provided the intellectual foundation for the Resolution of the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Central Committee (1996) on education and training but also paved the way for establishing education as the foremost national policy in subsequent stages of national development (Central Committee, 1996; Hac, 2002; Central Committee for Science and Education, 2002).

Education as the Foremost National Policy and a Driving Force for Industrialization and Modernization (1996–2005)

The period from 1996 to 2005 marked a significant advancement in the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training. During this period, education was no longer regarded merely as a sector supporting socio-economic development; rather, it was formally established as the foremost national policy and recognized as a direct driving force behind the country's industrialization and modernization. This transformation was consistently reflected in the Documents of the Eighth National Party Congress (1996), the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 1996–2000, and was subsequently reaffirmed and further elaborated in the Documents of the Ninth National Party Congress (2001). This period also laid the foundation for the emergence of a modern education policy framework oriented toward developing high-quality human resources in the context of increasing international economic integration.

The Eighth National Party Congress was convened after Vietnam had largely overcome its socio-economic crisis and entered a new phase of accelerating national industrialization and modernization. The Political Report affirmed that: "The tasks set for the initial stage of the transition period—preparing the preconditions for industrialization—have basically been accomplished, making it possible to move into a new period of accelerating the country's industrialization and modernization." Within this context, education was identified as a prerequisite for developing the

human resources necessary to support the transformation of the country's growth model and enhance national competitiveness (CPV, 1996).

This orientation was further articulated in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 1996–2000, in which the Party acknowledged that education had entered a new phase of recovery and development following the initial years of Đổi mới (Renovation). The Strategy noted that "education and training have achieved new progress… the literacy rate has reached approximately 90 percent; the systems of higher education and specialized secondary education have expanded in terms of scale, disciplines, and modes of provision; and national university centers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, together with three regional university centers, are taking shape" (CPV, 1996). These achievements reflected a shift from the earlier objective of expanding access to education toward developing an education system capable of supplying the human resources required by an industrializing economy.

The most significant conceptual breakthrough during this period was the formal recognition of education as the foremost national policy. The Documents of the Eighth National Party Congress emphasized that educational development should be closely integrated with science and technology in order to directly serve the country's industrialization and modernization agenda. This perspective was operationalized through policies aimed at reforming educational objectives, curricula, and teaching methods; expanding vocational and higher education; diversifying educational provision; and increasing state investment while mobilizing broader societal resources for educational development. This represented a substantial advance over the previous period, as education came to be regarded not only as a social sector but also as a strategic investment in national development (CPV, 1996).

Building upon the expansion of educational access, the 1996–2000 Socio-Economic Development Strategy also candidly acknowledged the shortcomings of Vietnam's education system, noting that "the quality of education and training remains low; educational provision in remote, mountainous, and disadvantaged areas continues to face considerable difficulties," while emphasizing the need for substantial reforms to improve the quality of human resources (CPV, 1996). This perspective demonstrates that the Party's educational thinking had shifted from prioritizing quantitative expansion toward emphasizing educational quality and effectiveness, in line with the requirements of developing a socialist-oriented market economy.

The Ninth National Party Congress (2001) further consolidated and elevated the Party's understanding of the role of education in the context of globalization and the emerging knowledge economy. The Political Report declared that the country had "entered a period of accelerating industrialization and modernization," while emphasizing the necessity of mobilizing the strength of the entire nation to build an economy founded

on knowledge and high-quality human resources. The Congress also acknowledged the significant achievements of the education sector during the 1996–2000 period, noting that "education and training have expanded in scale and physical infrastructure; the educational attainment of the population and the quality of human resources have improved; and Vietnam has achieved the national standards for literacy eradication and universal primary education" (CPV, 2001).

Based on this assessment, the Ninth National Party Congress continued to place education at the center of the national development strategy. Education was explicitly linked with science, technology, and international integration to cultivate a workforce equipped with professional expertise, vocational skills, and innovative capabilities capable of meeting the demands of a knowledge-based economy (CPV, 2001). This perspective also reflected a fundamental shift from an educational model primarily concerned with expanding learning opportunities toward one focused on developing human capabilities as a strategic source of national competitiveness.

A defining feature of the 1996–2005 period was the simultaneous development of educational reform policies across three key dimensions: expanding educational provision, diversifying educational institutions, and progressively reforming governance mechanisms. The establishment of the national universities, the expansion of regional university systems, the development of non-public higher education institutions, and increased public investment in education collectively laid the foundation for Vietnam's modern higher education system. At the same time, the policy of the socialization of education was implemented more vigorously to mobilize resources from across society, thereby gradually reducing the education sector's exclusive reliance on the state budget.

Overall, the period from 1996 to 2005 represented a major turning point in the evolution of the Party's educational thinking. Whereas the 1986–1995 period established education as an instrument for advancing the Đổi mới (Renovation) process, this subsequent phase elevated education to the status of the foremost national policy, directly linking it to the national strategies of industrialization, modernization, and human resource development. The principles articulated in the Documents of the Eighth National Party Congress, the 1996–2000 Socio-Economic Development Strategy, and the Ninth National Party Congress provided the theoretical and policy foundations for the far-reaching educational reforms implemented in Vietnam during the following decade.

Fundamental Educational Reform, High-Quality Human Resource Development, and International Integration (2006–2020)

The period from 2006 to 2020 marked a significant advancement in the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training. Whereas the previous period had established education as the foremost national policy in support of industrialization and modernization, the Tenth

through the Twelfth National Party Congresses reconceptualized education as the foundation of sustainable development, closely linked to the development of high-quality human resources, the knowledge economy, and international integration. Most notably, this period witnessed the emergence of the policy of fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training, representing a watershed in the history of Vietnam's educational policy (CPV, 2006, 2011, 2016; Central Committee, 2013).

The Tenth National Party Congress (2006) was convened as Vietnam was preparing to accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO), creating an urgent need to enhance the quality of human resources in order to compete effectively in an increasingly globalized economy. The Political Report positively assessed the achievements of the education sector after two decades of Đổi mới (Renovation), stating that: "Education and training have continued to develop and have received increased investment. Educational infrastructure has been strengthened. The scale of education has expanded, particularly in specialized secondary education and vocational training. The educational attainment of the population has improved." Nevertheless, the Report also identified critical shortcomings, emphasizing that "the quality of education and training remains low. Science and technology have yet to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization" (CPV, 2006).

These assessments reflected a fundamental shift in the Party's thinking—from prioritizing the expansion of educational provision to emphasizing the quality and effectiveness of education and training. Education was no longer expected merely to improve the population's educational attainment; it was now required to produce a workforce capable of competing in a knowledge-based economy and an increasingly integrated international environment. It was also during this period that concepts such as educational quality, human resources, vocational education, and research universities became increasingly prominent in Party documents.

A further turning point was established at the Eleventh National Party Congress (2011). In the context of reviewing twenty-five years of Đổi mới and formulating the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 2011–2020, the Party identified education, together with science and technology, as one of the decisive factors underpinning national competitiveness. The Political Report observed that: "Educational reform has achieved initial results. State budget expenditure on education and training has exceeded 20 percent of total government expenditure; greater attention has been paid to mobilizing social resources for education and training... The scale of education has continued to expand... The proportion of trained workers increased, reaching 40 percent of the employed workforce in 2010" (CPV, 2011).

More importantly, the Eleventh National Party Congress identified human resource development, particularly the development of high-quality human resources, as one of the country's three strategic breakthroughs for the new stage of development. Concurrently, through the supplementation and development of the Platform for National Construction during the Transition to Socialism (2011), the Party emphasized the need to accelerate industrialization, modernization, and international integration based on new perceptions and policy thinking that were more closely aligned with Vietnam's practical conditions. This approach represented a significant conceptual shift, moving beyond the view of education as merely a social sector to recognizing it as a direct driver of knowledge-based growth and innovation-led development.

Building upon this foundation, the Eighth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee adopted Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW (2013) on the Fundamental and Comprehensive Reform of Education and Training. This was the most significant thematic Party document on education since the Resolution of the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Central Committee (1996), marking a new stage in the evolution of the Party's educational policy thinking. The Resolution shifted the focus from piecemeal reforms to comprehensive reform encompassing educational objectives, curricula, content, teaching methods, governance mechanisms, financing, and quality assurance. At the same time, it identified the development of learners' competencies and qualities, the construction of a learning society, and international integration as the strategic orientations of Vietnam's education system (Central Committee, 2013).

The Twelfth National Party Congress (2016) further inherited and developed these ideas in the context of Vietnam's deepening international integration. The Political Report acknowledged that "education and training, science and technology, culture, social affairs, and healthcare have made notable progress." At the same time, it candidly pointed out that "many shortcomings and weaknesses in education and training, science and technology... have yet to be effectively addressed"; "the quality of human resources remains low"; and "international integration has, in some respects, lacked proactiveness and has not achieved the desired level of effectiveness" (CPV, 2016). These assessments demonstrate that the Party not only recognized the achievements of the education sector but also critically evaluated the structural bottlenecks that continued to constrain its development.

A defining feature of the Twelfth National Party Congress was its integration of educational reform with the broader objectives of international integration and sustainable development. The Political Report identified one of the principal lessons derived from thirty years of Đổi mới (Renovation) as the need to "proactively and actively pursue international integration while maintaining independence and self-

reliance, with national interests as the supreme objective" (CPV, 2016). This perspective positioned education as a pivotal instrument for preparing human resources capable of meeting international standards while simultaneously preserving Vietnam's national identity and socialist orientation.

From the perspective of policy history, the period from 2006 to 2020 represented a substantial maturation of the Party's thinking on education and training. Whereas the Tenth National Party Congress emphasized improving educational quality to meet the demands of industrialization, the Eleventh National Party Congress elevated the development of high-quality human resources to the status of a strategic breakthrough, and the Twelfth National Party Congress further linked educational reform with international integration and sustainable development. Collectively, these policy documents established the intellectual and policy foundations for the subsequent adoption of major initiatives on digital transformation, innovation, and educational development in the post-2020 period.

Education, Innovation, and National Development in the New Era (2021–2026)

The Thirteenth National Party Congress (2021) marked the beginning of a new phase in the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education. Education was no longer viewed primarily through the lens of human resource development; rather, it was situated within an integrated framework encompassing science, technology, innovation, digital transformation, and national competitiveness. Against the backdrop of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the COVID-19 pandemic, and intensifying strategic competition among nations, education came to be regarded as the foundation for building a knowledge-based economy, developing a digital nation, and realizing Vietnam's aspiration to become a developed country by 2045. This conceptual shift represented a significant advancement in the Party's educational thinking—from viewing education as an instrument supporting industrialization to conceiving it as a core component of the national innovation ecosystem (CPV, 2021; CPV, 2026).

The Political Report of the Thirteenth National Party Congress affirmed that the country's strategic objective was to "foster the aspiration for national development; promote the will and strength of the great national unity in combination with the strength of the times; continue to comprehensively and synchronously advance the cause of renewal... striving for Vietnam to become a developed country with a socialist orientation by the middle of the twenty-first century" (CPV, 2021). Within this strategic vision, education and training were identified as one of the principal drivers of national development. The Report observed that "the policy of fundamentally and comprehensively reforming education and training has been actively implemented and has achieved initial results...

University management and governance have undergone significant reforms, and the quality of higher education has gradually improved... International cooperation in education and training has continued to expand. High-quality human resources have increased in both quantity and quality" (CPV, 2021). At the same time, the Report emphasized that "science and technology have gradually affirmed their role as a driving force for socio-economic development... creating positive momentum for innovation and entrepreneurial activities" (CPV, 2021).

This new thinking was institutionalized more explicitly in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 2021–2030, in which science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation were, for the first time, identified as the principal foundations of national development. The overarching theme of the Strategy affirmed that rapid and sustainable development must be achieved "on the basis of science and technology, innovation, and digital transformation." Its first development orientation further emphasized that "rapid and sustainable development must rely primarily on science and technology, innovation, and digital transformation... regarding these as the decisive factors for enhancing productivity, quality, efficiency, and national competitiveness." Notably, the Strategy also stipulated that "the human factor must be maximized, with people regarded as the center, the driving force, the most important resource, and the ultimate objective of development," thereby expanding the role of education beyond human resource training to encompass the comprehensive development of human capital in support of innovation-driven development (CPV, 2021).

A defining characteristic of this period was the close integration of education with national digital transformation. The Thirteenth National Party Congress not only continued to promote university autonomy, governance reform, and improvements in educational quality, but also positioned education within the broader agenda of building a digital government, digital economy, and digital society. This orientation was further reinforced by thematic Party resolutions on digital transformation and the development of science and technology, most notably Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW (2024), which established the policy framework for higher education institutions to evolve into hubs of innovation, scientific research, and technology transfer.

The Fourteenth National Party Congress (2026) further advanced this thinking within the context of what it described as "the nation's era of ascent." The Political Report emphasized that the country had entered a new stage of development in which "the Fourth Industrial Revolution is unfolding rapidly, profoundly, and comprehensively, particularly with the advancement of artificial intelligence." In reviewing the achievements of the Thirteenth Congress term, the Report affirmed that "the three strategic breakthroughs have been implemented in a coordinated manner... the quality of human resources has continued to improve... greater emphasis

has been placed on investment in science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation... thereby creating momentum for the renewal of the growth model." The Fourteenth National Party Congress also acknowledged that "the fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training has achieved several important outcomes... the quality of education and training at all educational levels has improved, while international cooperation in education and training has continued to expand." Furthermore, the Report reaffirmed that "science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation continue to be identified as key drivers of development," demonstrating both the continuity and the further advancement of the educational thinking first articulated at the Thirteenth National Party Congress (CPV, 2026).

Viewed from a historical policy perspective, the period 2021–2026 represents the most advanced stage in the evolution of the Party's thinking on education since the inception of Đổi mới (Renovation). Whereas earlier periods emphasized universal education, the improvement of educational attainment, human resource development, and the fundamental reform of education, this phase shifted toward the construction of an integrated education–science–innovation–digital transformation ecosystem as the foundation of national competitiveness. Education is now positioned at the center of the country's development strategy, serving not only as a driver of high-quality human resource development but also as an institutional platform for the creation of knowledge, technological advancement, and innovation. In this capacity, education is expected to make a decisive contribution to realizing Vietnam's aspiration of becoming a developed, high-income country by the middle of the twenty-first century.

Table 1. The Evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Thinking on Education and Training through the Sixth to the Fourteenth National Party Congresses

No.	National Party Congress	Development Context	Dominant Educational Thinking	Major Policy Developments
1	Sixth (1986)	Launch of the Đổi mới (Renovation) process	Education in service of Đổi mới and socio-economic development	Linked education with socio-economic development planning; reformed educational content; mobilized social resources for education; integrated education with scientific research and production.
2	Seventh (1991)	Stabilization and development following Đổi mới	Education as a driving force for national development	Recognized science and education as key drivers of development; modernized educational content and

				teaching methods; diversified the education system; laid the groundwork for a new round of educational reform.
3	Eighth (1996)	Acceleration of industrialization and modernization	Education as the foremost national policy	Linked education to industrialization and modernization; promoted human resource development; expanded public investment and the socialization of education; implemented the Resolution of the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Central Committee.
4	Ninth (2001)	International economic integration	Education for the knowledge economy and human resource development	Enhanced the quality of human resources; aligned educational reform with science and technology; expanded higher education and vocational education.
5	Tenth (2006)	Accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO)	Enhancing the quality of education and human resources	Shifted the focus from quantitative expansion to quality improvement; reformed educational governance; prepared for international integration in education.
6	Eleventh (2011)	Review of 25 years of Đổi mới	Fundamental educational reform and the development of high-quality human resources	Identified human resource development as one of the country's three strategic breakthroughs; promoted fundamental educational reform; adopted Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW.
7	Twelfth (2016)	Deepening international integration	Fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training	Implemented Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW; promoted an open education system; improved the quality of higher education; linked education with international integration and sustainable development.

8	Thirteenth (2021)	Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital transformation	Education integrated with science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation	Developed high-quality human resources; reformed educational governance; advanced digital transformation in education; strengthened university autonomy; fostered the innovation ecosystem.
9	Fourteenth (2026)	A new era of national development	Education as the foundation of an innovation-driven nation	Developed a modern, open, and internationally integrated education system; trained human resources for artificial intelligence and the digital economy; advanced the education–science–innovation ecosystem; implemented Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW.

Source: Compiled by the author based on the Documents of the Sixth to the Fourteenth National Party Congresses (CPV, 1986–2026).

Discussion

Enduring Elements in the Party's Educational Thinking

Although the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training has undergone substantial refinement and development over four decades of Đổi mới (Renovation), the Documents of the Sixth through the Fourteenth National Party Congresses reveal a number of fundamental principles that have remained remarkably consistent. Foremost among these is the view that education and training constitute a driving force for national development. As early as the Sixth National Party Congress, education was required to be closely aligned with socio-economic development planning and to serve the Đổi mới process (CPV, 1986). This perspective was further expanded at the Seventh National Party Congress, where the Party affirmed that science and education were the "driving force" enabling the country to overcome poverty and underdevelopment. It subsequently evolved into the policy of recognizing education as the foremost national policy at the Eighth National Party Congress and was further elevated through the identification of human resource development as one of the country's three strategic breakthroughs at the Eleventh National Party Congress (CPV, 1991, 1996, 2011). By the Thirteenth and Fourteenth National Party Congresses, education had been firmly positioned at the center of the strategy for rapid and sustainable national development, closely integrated with science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation (CPV, 2021, 2026).

Second, the concept of comprehensive human development has remained a consistent theme throughout successive Party Congresses. From the initial objectives of improving educational attainment, training human resources, and nurturing talent during the early years of Đổi mới, the Party's thinking gradually evolved toward recognizing human beings as both the objective and the driving force of development. Hac (1996, 2002) argues that this transformation reflects a shift from an educational philosophy oriented toward addressing immediate developmental needs to one focused on cultivating human resources and human capital as the foundation of sustainable development. This perspective was reaffirmed in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy for 2021–2030, which identifies people as "the center, the driving force, the most important resource, and the ultimate objective of development" (CPV, 2021).

Third, educational reform has consistently been aligned with the country's developmental needs, serving as a unifying principle throughout the Party's policy documents. Although the specific content of reform has evolved across different historical periods—from expanding educational access (1986–1995), supporting industrialization and modernization (1996–2005), implementing fundamental and comprehensive educational reform (2006–2020), to promoting digital transformation and innovation (2021–2026)—its overarching objective has remained unchanged: to develop human resources capable of meeting the country's evolving development requirements. This represents a defining characteristic of the Party's educational policy during the Đổi mới era, namely the close alignment between educational development and the nation's broader socio-economic development strategy.

Finally, the Documents of successive National Party Congresses consistently affirm the principle of mobilizing the combined efforts of the State and society as a whole in advancing education. From the Sixth National Party Congress's call for mobilizing societal resources for education to subsequent policies promoting a learning society, expanding international cooperation, and strengthening institutional autonomy in education, the Party has consistently regarded education as the responsibility of the entire society. Dung and Nhu (2025) argue that the continuity of these foundational principles has ensured the stability of the Party's educational policy while simultaneously providing the basis for the gradual incorporation of new policy thinking in response to the changing demands of successive stages of national development.

New Developments in the Party's Educational Thinking

Alongside its enduring continuity, the evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training during the Đổi mới (Renovation) period has also been characterized by significant conceptual advances that reflect the country's changing developmental needs and the transformation of the international environment. These developments

have not altered the fundamental nature of the Party's educational policy; rather, they have broadened its scope, elevated its strategic vision, and incorporated new policy orientations appropriate to successive stages of national development.

The first major development is the transition from expanding the education system to pursuing the fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training. During the period 1986–2005, the Documents of the National Party Congresses primarily focused on expanding educational provision, improving educational attainment, and developing human resources to support industrialization and modernization (CPV, 1986, 1991, 1996, 2001). Beginning with the Eleventh National Party Congress, and particularly following the adoption of Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW, the emphasis shifted toward comprehensive reform encompassing educational objectives, curricula, teaching methods, governance mechanisms, and quality assurance (Central Committee, 2013). This transformation reflects the evolution from incremental, sector-specific reforms to a systemic approach to reforming Vietnam's national education system.

Second, the Party's understanding of the role of education in national development has continued to expand. Whereas education was initially regarded primarily as a means of developing human resources for economic growth, the Party has progressively redefined it as the foundation of human development, innovation, and national competitiveness. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth National Party Congresses positioned education within an integrated framework encompassing science, technology, innovation, and digital transformation, while identifying the development of high-quality human resources as a decisive prerequisite for achieving the country's development objectives through 2030 and its vision for 2045 (CPV, 2021, 2026; Politburo, 2024).

Third, the scope of the Party's educational policy has evolved from a predominantly domestic development agenda to one closely aligned with international integration and global knowledge governance. Whereas the Tenth National Party Congress primarily addressed international integration within the field of education and training, the Thirteenth and Fourteenth National Party Congresses advanced a broader vision centered on building an open education system, promoting international cooperation, developing research universities, strengthening technology transfer, and actively participating in global innovation networks (CPV, 2021, 2026). This represents an important conceptual shift—from viewing education as an instrument serving national development to recognizing it as a strategic means of enhancing Vietnam's international standing and competitiveness within the global knowledge economy.

Finally, the Party's most recent policy documents reveal the emergence of a new vision of educational development for the digital era. Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW (2024) and Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW (2025) have broadened the scope of educational policy beyond curriculum reform

and pedagogical innovation to encompass the development of a digital education ecosystem, the application of artificial intelligence, the promotion of innovation, and the preparation of human resources capable of supporting the country's national digital transformation (Politburo, 2024, 2025). According to Dung and Nhu (2025), this represents a new stage in the Party's educational thinking, reflecting a transition from an educational model designed primarily to support industrialization toward one that cultivates innovation capacity, thereby enabling Vietnam to enter a new era of development founded on knowledge, technology, and human creativity.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the literature on Vietnamese education by advancing a historical policy approach through the direct analysis of the Documents of the Sixth through the Fourteenth National Party Congresses. Rather than examining education primarily from the perspectives of educational management, reform implementation, or policy outcomes, this study elucidates the formation, continuity, and evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training over nearly four decades of Đổi mới (Renovation). In doing so, it demonstrates that the Party's educational policy has evolved as a continuous process that has consistently upheld its fundamental objectives of human development and national development, while continuously incorporating new policy orientations in response to the changing demands of successive historical periods (Hac, 2002; Dung & Nhu, 2025).

From a practical perspective, the study provides a valuable reference for the continued refinement of Vietnam's educational policy in the context of implementing Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW on the development of science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation, and Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW on breakthroughs in education and training development (Politburo, 2024, 2025). Furthermore, by systematically tracing the evolution of the Party's educational thinking across successive National Party Congresses, the study clarifies both the continuity and the strategic orientation of Vietnam's educational policy. It therefore provides a sound scholarly foundation for research and teaching on the history of educational policy, while also informing the formulation of future strategies for educational development, the cultivation of high-quality human resources, and the promotion of innovation in Vietnam's new era of national development.

Conclusion

This study has examined the evolution of the Communist Party of Vietnam's thinking on education and training during the period 1986–2026 through a systematic analysis of the Documents of the Sixth to the Fourteenth National Party Congresses, complemented by thematic Party

resolutions and representative scholarly works on educational policy. The findings demonstrate that the Party's educational policy has not evolved through abrupt shifts between successive Party terms; rather, it has developed as a continuous process characterized by both continuity and innovation. Beginning with the view of education as an instrument serving the Đổi mới (Renovation) process (1986–1995), the Party progressively established education as the foremost national policy in support of industrialization and modernization (1996–2005), subsequently advancing toward the policy of fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training, the development of high-quality human resources, and international integration (2006–2020). Most recently, this thinking has expanded to position education within an integrated framework encompassing science, technology, innovation, and national digital transformation during the period 2021–2026.

This trajectory reflects the Party's capacity to adapt to changes in both the domestic and international environments while maintaining a consistent commitment to human development, the enhancement of human resource quality, and the broader objective of national development. Each National Party Congress has preserved the fundamental principles established during previous periods while simultaneously introducing new policy orientations that respond to the developmental priorities of its time. This evolution demonstrates that the Party's educational thinking has become increasingly comprehensive—shifting from expanding educational access to improving educational quality, from human resource training to the cultivation of innovation capabilities, and from supporting economic growth to establishing the institutional foundations for national development in the digital era.

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the scholarship on Vietnamese education by extending the historical policy approach through the direct analysis of Party documents, rather than relying solely on evaluations of policy implementation and outcomes. This approach provides a clearer understanding of the internal logic underpinning the evolution of the Party's educational policy over nearly four decades of Đổi mới, while also offering a diachronic perspective on the development of its policy thinking. Furthermore, the findings have practical significance for the implementation of Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW (2024) and Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW (2025), providing a scholarly foundation for the continued refinement of Vietnam's educational policy, the development of high-quality human resources, and the construction of a modern, open, and innovation-driven education system capable of supporting the country's objectives of rapid and sustainable development in the new era.

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