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Reforming Higher Education in Vietnam in the Context of Digital Transformation: A Philosophical Approach and Policy Implications

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Abstract

Alongside other factors like governance and curriculum innovation, higher education in Vietnam is in need of reforms from a philosophical point of view for several reasons. In particular, in order to meet the needs posed by the current state of digital transformation and globalization in general, higher education has to adopt new approaches both in terms of its internal policies and in its orientation and overall philosophy. This paper considers the role of philosophy in the process of reforming higher education, especially from the point of view of helping with the development of worldviews, human development, methodologies and directions for action [1, 2, 3]. Based on the theoretical and conceptual framework for analysis, coupled with philosophical interpre-

tation, critical analysis and policy synthesis, three main roles for philosophy in the context of higher education can be identified, including a cognitive role, a critical one and a value-orienting one. Referring these findings to the specifics of the Vietnamese case, in particular to digital transformation, higher education autonomy and re-structure in universities in Ho Chi Minh city, the author identifies several challenges in implementing these ideas in practice, such as problems with theory versus practice, lack of academic resources and constraints on the work of the teaching staff.

Keywords: higher education, liberal education, philosophy of education, educational reform, sustainable development in education

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation is among the most significant forces of change in higher education across the globe. It does not affect just teaching approaches and the learning environment but also the governance of universities, their programs, processes of knowledge generation, and even the nexus of education, technology, and society. Vietnam's higher education reform takes place within the framework of international integration, university autonomy, the restructuring of higher education institutions, and growing demands for high-quality human capital in the country. These changes oblige universities to adapt to technological innovations, but they also call for a thorough reconsideration of the deeper purpose, essence, and mission of higher education [1, 2].

As much as digital transformation presents new opportunities for advancing access to and the quality of education, as well as improving educational management, efficiency, and innovation in higher education, it also poses several challenging questions. If the concept of reform were reduced to mere technological innovations, managerial practices, performance indicators, and labor-market orientation, higher education would lose its essential character. University cannot be considered simply an institution of professional and technical training; it also represents the space for creating and sharing knowledge, engaging in critical thinking, making ethical evaluations, and developing as human beings. Therefore, reforming higher education in the age of digitalization calls for more than a technological, organizational, and managerial response; it also requires philosophical considerations.

Philosophy serves as a useful framework for answering the challenging questions posed by digital transformation. It is the discipline associated with worldview, theory of knowledge, ethics, value, and methodology. Thus, it helps determine the nature of universities and their mission at different stages of their development. It enables the participants of educational process, including educators, administrative staff, students, and even policymakers, to critically analyze the basic assumptions of reforming policies, evaluate the possible effects of digitalization, and preserve the humanistic and liberal features of education. Hence, philosophy should be seen as an instrument for promoting higher education reform, not as an abstract discipline divorced from practical educational problems.

To date, a number of empirical and conceptual works have been dedicated to various aspects of higher education reform, including internationalization, university governance, academic autonomy, quality assurance, and digital transformation [3, 1]. Meanwhile, other scholars have criticized the instrumental approach to higher education and called for preventing the commercialization and commoditization of education due to its alignment with market criteria and efficiency [1, 4]. In Vietnam, studies have mostly focused on issues related to governance, policy, quality assurance, and digital transformation. Few attempts have been made to develop theoretical and conceptual frameworks for understanding philosophy-based approaches to higher education reform [2, 5, 6]. Therefore, there is a need for further research on philosophy's functions in relation to higher education reform.

In this study, the researchers attempt to bridge this gap and analyze the role of philosophy in higher education reform in Vietnam. Specifically, it discusses the key roles of philosophy, which include cognitive, critical, and value-orienting functions performed by philosophy in rethinking higher education in the modern age. In turn, the authors refer to international literature on the philosophy of education, relating it to the Vietnamese context and focusing on topics like digital transformation, university autonomy, and higher education institution's restructuring in Ho Chi Minh City. Based on this analysis, the article formulates policy implications of incorporating philosophical thinking into higher education reforms.

2. METHODS

The current research uses a theoretical-conceptual research method to explore the relationship between philosophy and the direction towards higher education reform in Vietnam in relation to digital transformation. The chosen methodology suits the research since it focuses on developing and systematically structuring the concept. Philosophical interpretive analysis is used in the paper to develop understanding about certain concepts such as higher education, higher education reform, digital transformation, and philosophy of education [1, 2]. Besides, the critical analysis is used to investigate emerging trends in higher education, including instrumentalization and commercialization of knowledge, governance based on markets, and technologization of education. Moreover, relevant higher education policy and academic literature will be reviewed considering the Vietnamese perspective, especially concerning digital transformation, autonomy in universities, and reorganization of higher education institutions in Ho Chi Minh city [3].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA AS A HUMANE AND CREATIVE SPACE

In light of the digital transformation and deep societal shifts associated with the knowledge society, the role of philosophy becomes crucial for rethinking the nature, mission, and value orientation of higher education. Philosophically speaking,

higher education cannot be defined simply as an organization that transmits knowledge or supplies people according to the demands of the market. Instead, it is necessary to recognize higher education as a social, economic, political, and intellectual institution that develops against the background of specific economic, technological, ethical, and other conditions of particular eras. In the digital era, artificial intelligence, big data, e-learning systems, and algorithmic governance are becoming increasingly prevalent within teaching, learning, research, evaluation, and institutional management in higher education. The digital transformation creates new possibilities, but, at the same time, it is important that higher education defines itself as a space for humanistic development, avoiding reductionism.

Philosophy allows recognizing the limitations of technocratic and instrumental approaches to higher education reform. In the case of viewing the digital transformation of higher education as the mere implementation of technology in the process of teaching and administrative governance, the transformation may lose its comprehensive character. Therefore, any digital transformation in higher education should necessarily start with some deeper questions, such as the following ones: What is the mission of higher education? Who should be educated within higher education institutions? What are the values of teaching, research, governance, and social engagement in higher education institutions? These questions prove that the digital transformation is not just a technological problem but also a philosophical and ethical issue. Philosophy provides an opportunity to analyze the basic assumptions underlying the reform policies and to ensure that the technological innovations do not turn into a pure technique unrelated to human and academic dimensions of the higher education process.

Based on this philosophical analysis, digital transformation in higher education should be viewed as the humane and creative process in which human beings are at the core of educational development. Namely, it is necessary to view the learners of higher education institutions not just as potential workers, quantifiable results of educational processes, and consumers of educational services but as developing subjects that need to be given chances to cultivate critical thinking, ethical considerations, creativity, cultural knowledge, professional qualities, and skills in constructing meaning in a fast-changing world. At the same time, the lecturers should be regarded not just as providers of information but as intellectual agents who lead educational and research inquiries and encourage dialogue and critical thinking. The philosophy of education helps understand that higher education should focus not only on technological tools or educational techniques but also on the formation of personality, intellectual independence, moral and civic responsibility, etc. That is, apart from producing useful knowledge and professional skills, higher education should also generate certain cultural values, ethical judgments, and social responsibility. Thus, if a university manages to harmoniously integrate digital transformation with philosophical thinking, then it will become a space in which students learn how to use the technological innovations in a critical way.

These views are consistent with the international discussions about the concept of liberal education, humanistic education, and sustainability in higher education [1, 3]. In the international context, the value of higher education goes beyond such aspects as employability or productivity. Instead, it consists of such qualities as the formation of responsible citizens, protection of academic freedom, encouragement of independent thinking, social justice, sustainability, etc. However, the Vietnamese context poses special demands concerning the issue of higher education reform. Indeed, higher education in Vietnam is now undergoing digital transformation, university autonomy, organizational restructuring, the reform of quality assurance, and international integration. Such an overlap of the transformations makes it necessary to have some consistent philosophical vision, which would prevent reform from being focused on administrative or technological changes only.

Ho Chi Minh City represents an important part of the current discussion since this city houses many higher education institutions that are actively participating in the mentioned transformative processes. Within the timeframe 2025–2026 and in the years that follow, the universities in Ho Chi Minh City will be facing numerous challenges such as the availability of technological infrastructure, changing attitudes of the labor market, university mergers and restructurings, academic competition, etc. Thus, a philosophical stance affirming higher education as a humane and creative institution becomes important because it provides grounds for maintaining the academic mission, educational quality, and social responsibility of universities while adapting to the digital transformation.

From the perspective of axiology, the most significant question is not only how higher education operates, but what values it serves. Apart from the production of economic value or the supply of qualified employees to the labor market, it is also a matter of higher education to foster ethical professionals, critical thinking, social and civic responsibility, etc. As concerns this goal, much attention should be paid to professional ethics, global citizenship, social justice, equality, cultural identity, and sustainability. The foundations of political philosophy and ethics are very helpful in answering these questions and discussing the responsibility of higher education institutions in the period of technological innovation and development.

One of the key missions of higher education is liberal education and holistic human development. In particular, higher education cannot limit its activities exclusively to the training of workers for the labor market, but it should also educate humans who can reflect on and solve various problems in life. In the terms of classical philosophical tradition, higher education should focus on human flourishing, which is understood as the development of all human capacities related

to the intellect, morality, society, and emotions. Modern universities need to combine professional specialization with general liberal education, natural sciences with social sciences and humanities, innovation with ethical responsibility, etc. Otherwise, digital transformation might result in the emergence of technically advanced students who lack the reflective capacities needed for dealing with socioethical issues.

Finally, it is also possible to argue that higher education institutions are obliged to play a role in shaping the relation between human beings and technologies in the digital era. Learners of modern universities have to be ready for living and working in such environment where the borders between the real and virtual worlds, human decisions and computer recommendations, etc., become increasingly blurred. Therefore, universities have to help learners critically analyze the ethical, cultural, and socio-political aspects of artificial intelligence, big data, automation, and the operation of digital platforms. Thus, philosophy becomes important for the process of higher education reform as it allows approaching digital transformation not as a question of efficiency but also as a matter of meaning and value.

3.2. CHALLENGES TO ENHANCING THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN CONTEMPORARY HIGHER EDUCATION

Despite the crucial importance of philosophy in shaping higher education reforms, the status of philosophy in modern higher education is hampered by various structural, academic, and cultural barriers that make it less important than some other subjects. The barriers become more obvious when it comes to higher education reforms aimed at transforming higher education through the implementation of information technologies. Because of this, philosophy may be viewed as the general theory that does not have anything to do with education reforms.

The gap between philosophical theory and educational practice. A critical issue is the existing divide between philosophical ideas and educational practices. This division undermines the significance of philosophy and limits the theoretical scope of higher education reforms. In many academic curricula, philosophy continues to be regarded merely as a mandatory subject taught theoretically, in contrast to specific educational problems related to teaching, research, governance, professionalism, digitalisation, and social responsibility. The lack of practical application in the teaching of philosophy makes it challenging to identify its significance for modern higher education.

It may limit the scope and efficiency of higher education reforms. Educational reforms are essential, and they may have various practical aspects, including the introduction of new teaching techniques, improvement of quality control systems, development of digital technologies, granting more autonomy to universities, or structural reforming. All of those reforms are needed, but the absence of philosophical reasoning may prevent their comprehensive implementation because higher education policies tend to be superficial and too focused on short-term results. A university may adopt some changes, improving its infrastructure and management, while at the same time being unable to articulate its goals and the type of education and human development it wants to promote.

Moreover, philosophy is rarely included in discussions related to educational reform because the latter takes place in the framework of policy-making, management, and technology. Philosophical insights cannot be applied in such processes, making it impossible for philosophical reasoning to participate in shaping an educational vision and institutional strategy of a university. To tackle this issue, universities should initiate conversations around real-life issues that could use philosophical insight, such as artificial intelligence in education, academic freedom, assessment ethics, student welfare, professionalism, and equitable access to education.

Limitations in resources and academic investment in philosophy. An additional problem is related to the limited amount of money invested in philosophical research and teaching. With regard to the competition of educational resources among disciplines, those subjects which are more closely associated with science, technologies, economy, management, and practical skills of a particular kind may enjoy priority in receiving support from institutions. Philosophical studies, however, might be seen as somewhat detached from the questions of employability or productivity. Consequently, philosophy will be receiving fewer funds for hiring teachers and scholars, conducting research projects, developing necessary infrastructure, introducing innovations, or engaging in international cooperation.

The problem will have its impact on the quality and innovativeness of philosophy teaching. Philosophy implies not just knowledge about old theories, but engagement with current issues, such as ethics of artificial intelligence, digital citizenship, ethical governance with the help of algorithms, philosophy of technologies, liberal education, ecological ethics, or humanistic perspectives on sustainable development. When philosophy teachers lack the access to current literature, funding for research, international networking, and interdisciplinary collaboration, it may be difficult to cope with the challenges imposed by the new intellectual situation.

Philosophy lecturers in many educational institutions tend to receive a substantial number of hours assigned to them in terms of teaching and little in terms of conducting research projects. They can rarely participate in international

cooperation, take part in conferences, publish papers in prestigious academic journals, or conduct interdisciplinary research. As a consequence, teaching of philosophy may stay traditional, overloaded with material, and detached from relevant problems.

Moreover, appropriate academic infrastructure should be created. Specialized libraries, digital sources, research centers, journals, and discussion platforms are crucial for philosophical work and innovation. Otherwise, philosophy will only stay engaged in traditional activities of teaching and nothing else, being unable to provide meaningful contribution to the governance of the educational sector and decision-making in it.

Issues concerning teaching staff and social awareness. Moreover, there are difficulties related to the competence of teaching staff and the social perception of the subject. Nowadays, philosophy lecturers should not only be competent in classical and modern philosophy but also in modern problems and trends associated with technology, education, management, culture, and social processes. Despite numerous efforts, certain philosophy lecturers experience problems with updating and acquiring the necessary competence related to digital transformation, artificial intelligence, educational technologies, and interdisciplinary studies. As a result, it becomes complicated for them to explain the relevance of philosophy and its role in addressing the pressing problems of the educational reforms.

The second problem concerns the methods used by philosophy lecturers. It is still common for some institutions to teach philosophy in a scholastic way without applying interactive and dialogue-based approaches. Moreover, lecturing and explaining key concepts of philosophy without engaging in discussions may make students feel that the subject is too difficult and far from life and practice. In order to help philosophy acquire new significance in higher education, it is essential for lecturers to inspire the interest to philosophy and show its application to professional ethics, digital culture, scientific ethics, social justice, and other aspects.

The necessity for changing the methods of teaching philosophy has appeared. Philosophy lecturers should use more frequently the following strategies: interactive, dialogical methods, case-based approach, interdisciplinary projects, ethical discussion, digital sources, and problem discussion. Such problems as using artificial intelligence in assessment procedures, the ethics of collecting and analyzing personal data, the process of commercializing knowledge, issues related to academic ethics, and various social roles of universities and other institutions may serve as examples of topics for discussion during lectures.

As for the problem of social perception of philosophy, it should be noted that this subject may seem secondary and uninteresting among students, lecturers, and even some administrators. In particular, students tend to view philosophy as a mandatory subject to study. Thus, philosophy tends to occupy a rather marginal place in education because there is no interest in learning this subject either on the side of lecturers or students. On the other hand, the labor market creates additional pressure on universities because employers are interested in certain skills.

It means that philosophy plays a subordinate role in this context because higher education institutions try to focus primarily on preparing specialists according to the requirements of companies. However, philosophy may serve an important function in higher education. The problem of philosophy in higher education is connected with the overall process of transforming this sphere into a market-oriented activity. In particular, it implies the predominance of quantitative indicators that affect the evaluation of disciplines and higher education institutions.

However, rapid changes in technology raise ethical and social questions regarding the responsibility of higher education institutions and professionals. Thus, philosophy becomes more relevant and essential as a part of higher education because people should learn to think critically and responsibly in order to address the arising problems.

3.3. ORIENTATIONS FOR PROMOTING THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM

It is important to promote the role of philosophy in the process of higher education reforms due to several reasons. First of all, the digital transformation of society has caused many challenges not only on technological and managerial levels, but also on epistemological, ethical, and developmental ones. Thus, philosophy offers a worldview as well as a scientific methodology that allows people, both learners and educators, to comprehend the concept of education as a whole. Secondly, it fosters the development of skills associated with critical thinking, value analysis, and the ability to study problems on different levels. Finally, philosophy is crucial for comprehensive education since modern society is becoming more complex and changeable.

It is also important to emphasize the significance of philosophy in shaping other objectives of comprehensive education. The main goal of modern higher education is to provide future employees with sufficient knowledge and skills that will allow them to perform their duties effectively. However, it would be reasonable to mention that higher education institutions can play an important role in the development of persons who will not only possess professional skills and abilities, but will be responsible citizens, capable of contributing to the development of their countries and societies.

Reforming the curriculum and teaching content of philosophy. Curricular reforms concerning the study of philosophy need to ensure that philosophical knowledge and skills could find connections to digital transformation, the ethical challenges associated with technology adoption, changes in culture, liberal education, and sustainable development. In particular, philosophy courses cannot be reduced to abstract concepts and historical ideas about various philosophical theories. The reform needs to make sure that the study of philosophy becomes an exercise that helps one critically examine certain problems and assess the values embedded in educational, technological, and social change processes.

Moreover, philosophy modules may be made more flexible by combining traditional philosophical knowledge and experience with interdisciplinary and applied themes. For instance, one can consider offering philosophy courses related to ‘Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence,’ ‘Philosophy of Technology,’ ‘Ethics of Digital Transformation,’ ‘Philosophy of Liberal Education,’ ‘Human Values in the Digital Society,’ and ‘Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility.’ Such themes will allow one to show the relevance of studying philosophy to the challenges people face at present. Moreover, they would contribute to developing critical and reflective thinking.

It is also recommended to adopt a problem-based and case-based approach to learning in the context of teaching philosophy. In addition to learning philosophy by using definitions and abstractions, students will have an opportunity to deal with specific problems. For example, they can talk about the application of artificial intelligence in the educational sector, commercialization of education, ethical aspects of online learning, social effects of automation, and the impact of technological innovation on human dignity. This approach will allow one to turn philosophy into an engaging academic discipline.

Developing teaching staff and strengthening academic collaboration. The issue of lecturers’ professional development is vital in making philosophers play their role in educational reforms. Philosophy can assist in conducting educational reforms if those involved in its study and application at universities have sufficient theoretical competence, humanitarian mindset, interdisciplinarity, and capability to combine their theoretical insights and practices with current educational challenges. This is why faculty development in philosophy should cover both the acquisition of knowledge about classical philosophical concepts and methods of teaching and practice of applied philosophy, philosophy of education, philosophy of technology, digital ethics, research methodology, and interdisciplinary communication.

Professional development courses should be arranged regularly by philosophy departments in the universities located in Ho Chi Minh City and other important academic centers. Among possible topics of such courses there could be discussion of innovative approaches to studying and applying philosophy, applied philosophy and liberal education, ethics of artificial intelligence, digital culture, university administration, educational policy analysis, among others. Lecturers can also be recommended to use innovations such as debate-based pedagogy, reflective writing, project-based learning, online discussions about philosophy, interdisciplinary communication, and case analysis. In this way, self-learning, reasoning, and reflection will become part of the learning process.

Furthermore, academic cooperation can be developed between philosophy departments, faculties of political theory, faculties of education, research institutes, and policy-making bodies. In Ho Chi Minh City, one can find several institutions including Vietnam National University, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, and other leading institutions with faculties of political theory and education where philosophy departments could develop academic connections related to philosophy of higher education. In this context, interdisciplinary conferences, research cooperation, curricula development, and international academic cooperation can take place.

Collaboration on an international level should also be promoted. Participation of scholars and institutions researching such issues as philosophy of education, digital ethics, ethics and artificial intelligence, liberal education, and higher education policies can facilitate the development of philosophical teaching and research in Vietnam. The opportunities to conduct lecturer exchange, joint research, comparative studies, and preparation of new teaching material could be considered. In this way, philosophy would serve as a subject of study at universities and academic discipline at the same time.

Repositioning philosophy in the context of university mergers and restructuring. In the context of university mergers and restructuring of their internal structure, the role of philosophy as an academic subject should be discussed both in terms of academic activity and institution’s identity, as well as its knowledge organization, governance, and development strategy. If the university is moving from the system when a student can specialize only in one field of study towards multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach, philosophy can serve as the means that can establish some common value foundation.

The process of university restructuring provides for the reconsideration of the role of philosophy in the academic system, thus it must be included in the list of academic courses or modules with the intention to cultivate critical thinking, ethical principles, value analysis, and academic responsibility rather than to be included into the list of general requirements and to serve as an introductory module. The universities engaged in teaching economics and business should include

courses on philosophy and ethics of business practices. Universities specializing in engineering and technology can focus on philosophy of technology and artificial intelligence ethics. The institutions preparing teachers for schools can teach philosophy of education, educational ethics, and humanistic pedagogy.

Furthermore, university restructuring may also provide an excellent opportunity to form interdisciplinary research or educational centers on applied philosophy, educational philosophy, and digital ethics. The subjects of their investigation might be connected to administration of universities, technology, education, sociology, economics, etc. They can conduct research on such topics as artificial intelligence in education, ethical governance of the digital learning platform, academic freedom, university autonomy, and the role of higher education institutions in ensuring social well-being. Provided there is sufficient financial and personnel potential, this idea might be realized successfully.

Finally, philosophers from different departments who now belong to various universities can cooperate in order to produce common teaching material, common curriculums, as well as seminars devoted to philosophy in the context of higher education reform. Thus, they will avoid redundancy of effort and will promote their academic discipline. Even more importantly, it will enable the philosophers to perform their function as connecting disciplines and to stimulate discussion between the specialized areas.

3.4. IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNANCE AND POLICY PLANNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Based on the above analysis, it is possible to make certain conclusions concerning the implications of the study for the governance of higher education and policy-making practices. First, the governance of higher education should be based on a philosophy. Educational philosophy can guide decision-making in connection with issues of digital transformation, university autonomy, international integration, restructuring, and reforming curricula. Otherwise, reform and adaptation may turn into a fragmentary, reactive process and will depend on short-term indicators. An educational philosophy will allow a university to state its goals, preserve academic values, and combine efficiency with the humanistic mission of education.

Second, the university needs philosophy as a tool for ethical risk management. With the introduction of new technological instruments (artificial intelligence, big data, learning analytics, online platforms, digital assessment systems), universities confront problems related to privacy, ethics of information use, fairness, transparency, academic freedom, academic integrity, intellectual independence, and even human dignity. To address them adequately, a university needs not only technical tools but also ethical and philosophical reasoning.

Third, policy-making processes in higher education should consider the role of philosophy in maintaining the humanistic and liberal mission of higher education. In the context of the digital era, universities are under pressure to react to labor market demands, to increase their ranking, to develop digital infrastructure, to show quantitative results, etc. This does not mean that universities should ignore these requirements. However, these requirements should not overshadow other goals of education, such as forming responsible persons, advancing science, social justice, preserving academic freedom, and sustainable development.

Finally, restructuring and merging university organizations can be viewed not only as a process of transforming structures but also as an opportunity for reconstruction of academic values and institutional identities. Philosophy of education can help to achieve this goal by providing basic principles for inter-disciplinary collaboration, ethical governance, coherent curricula, and the formation of academic culture. For multidisciplinary universities, philosophy can become a means of bridging disciplines by raising general questions about the knowledge, values, responsibilities, and human development in relation to all academic areas.

3.5. ACADEMIC DISCUSSION

The philosophical perspective used in the above discussion contributes to international academic discourse in connection with higher education governance in the digital era. In particular, international research focuses on the philosophy of education as a basis for questioning the dominant trends in higher education governance in the digital age. According to these studies, there is a risk of turning higher education into short-term skills training if it does not have a value-based intellectual foundation and a specific mission in society [1, 4].

At the same time, the Vietnamese context demonstrates the relevance of these concerns in the situation when a higher education system is actively undergoing digital transformation and restructuring. There is an obvious risk of reducing higher education to efficiency, competitiveness, and technological innovations in case if digital transformation does not take into account humanistic goals. Hence, philosophy can help to question instrumentalism and to orient higher education towards its traditional missions of forming responsible individuals, promoting sustainable development, and preserving academic freedom.

Compared to numerous studies devoted to higher education systems in developed countries, this article provides insights

in connection with Vietnam. The specificity of the Vietnamese context lies in the fact that the country needs to reform and modernize its higher education system under the condition of intense global competition, rapid economic development, and social stratification. Ho Chi Minh City is a special example of Vietnam's higher education system. Being one of the main centers of higher education, the city experiences powerful pressure on account of rapid development, institutional restructuring, and the need for qualified personnel.

From the standpoint of academic discourse, the study shows that the philosophy of education can serve as a link between theoretical discussions and practical policy-making in connection with issues relevant to higher education governance. This perspective allows linking such questions as the mission of universities and higher education as a whole with issues related to university governance, curricula, digital ethics, faculty training, and restructuring processes. Hence, philosophy should be considered as a policy-making method as well as a discipline.

For Vietnamese higher education in its further development during the 2026-2030 period, the philosophical perspective provided in this article can serve as a valuable reference. Successful transformation and reform in this context will require combining efficiency with equity, technological innovations with academic freedom and humanistic concerns.

3.6. ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Academic contributions. The presented article makes three principal academic contributions to existing scholarship on the topic. First, on a theoretical level, this study demonstrates how the philosophy of education should be understood as an ideological, methodological, and value-driven basis for digital transformation and higher education reforms in the contemporary era. The paper explains why traditional approaches that view philosophy as a general theoretical concept cannot provide sufficient guidance for the process of reform since they fail to promote self-reflection of goals, assess reform assumptions, and protect humanistic values.

Second, the current article makes a contribution to international discourse regarding higher education reforms by providing Vietnamese insights to the topic. As there is a relative lack of conceptual studies regarding the philosophical foundations of higher education reforms in transition countries, the current analysis of higher education in Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City as an example, expands comparative knowledge on how such processes proceed.

Third, on a practical and policymaking level, the paper outlines governance and policymaking recommendations that would contribute to the development of higher education through the integration of humanistic values and philosophical reflection in order to improve educational standards while ensuring academic freedom, responsibility, and sustainability.

Research limitations and directions for future research. While the current study makes significant contributions to scholarship, it has several limitations. First, due to the chosen theoretical-conceptual research design, the study does not include empirical surveys or quantitative analysis. Consequently, some of its findings are purely interpretive and call for additional empirical validation.

Second, despite focusing on Ho Chi Minh City, the current study focuses on systemic and conceptual aspects, rather than on a detailed analysis of particular institutions, programs, lectures, and students' experience. Further research on the topic might address the discussed limitations by looking into more concrete cases of universities, university models, philosophy reform in education, digital transformation policies, digital ethics education in institutions, etc.

Third, future researchers should utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to investigate how lecturers, students, educational institutions' administrations, and policymakers interpret their responsibilities as educators within the framework of the discussed philosophy and digital transformation.

Comparative studies between Vietnam and other Southeastern Asian countries or transition educational systems can also add to the academic value of future works on the topic. Building on the results of the present paper, future studies can investigate possible mechanisms for combining philosophy in digital transformation strategies, teachers' training, university governance, curricular changes, and so on.

4. CONCLUSION

From the theoretical-conceptual point of view, philosophy has performed multiple roles in the processes of higher education reform. First, philosophy is an instrument of redefinition of the nature and mission of higher education (its cognitive function). Second, philosophy is an ideological mechanism for raising doubts about the instrumentalism and commercialization of higher education (its critical function). Third, philosophy is a way of orienting to humanistic liberal and sustainable development model of universities (its value-orienting function) [1, 4]. Thus, philosophy plays a crucial role in the digital era in higher education, when it becomes more and more susceptible to technological advances, pressures of the market and administration, reforms in its organization, and globalization.

Higher education reform in the context of digital transformation cannot be limited to technological and administrative aspects. While technological and administrative innovations are important, any attempts to reform higher education

require the establishment of a conceptual foundation of higher education, which would promote academic freedom, moral responsibility, human dignity, and its social mission. Hence, philosophy becomes the means of maintaining the balance between different dimensions of digitalization of higher education such as efficiency and equity, innovation and humanism, modernization and sustainability.

Considering the special situation of higher education institutions in Vietnam regarding university autonomy, digital transformation, and institutional restructuring in Ho Chi Minh City, it seems appropriate to pay more attention to philosophical aspects of higher education reforms in order to make the higher education institution produce autonomous, creative, and socially responsible graduates. Future studies on the topic can employ an empirical and comparative approach and focus on both Vietnamese higher education institutions and the experience of other countries.

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