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Record enrollment for
SECONDARY EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

As the 1969-70 school year ended, educators in South Vietnam this summer celebrated the achievement of a goal they had worked hard to attain: 632,000, or 25 percent of all youths in the high school age group, were enrolled in the nation's 780 secondary schools.

This record figure represents nearly a twelve-fold increase in secondary school enrollment since the Republic of Vietnam assumed responsibility for its own educational system. It compares with a three percent enrollment in 1955,

when the French were withdrawing from the country and when only 53, 500 Vietnamese were attending secondary school classes. South Vietnam's population, then about 15 million, now is edging close to 18 million and the secondary school age group has expanded from about 1, 780, 000 in 1955 to 2, 528, 000 today. In that period high school classes have increased from 1, 100 to 10, 900 and teachers from 1, 900 to 16, 200.

When a Decade of Development program of educational expansion was launched in 1960, experts calculated that if the nation was to insure sustained economic, political and social growth in the future it would have to meet these enrollment targets:

- * 60 percent of all children between six and 11 years of age in primary schools;
- * 24 percent of those from 12 to 17 in secondary schools;
- * 8 percent of the 18-to-22 bracket in institutions of higher learning.

Today the primary school target has been exceeded by 22 percent and the secondary school target by one percent.

College enrollment of about 50,000 remains some 30 percent short of the objective. But with secondary schools now preparing more students potentially qualified for higher education (some 20,440 were enrolled in the 12th grade in 1969), university populations should swell at an increasing rate if plant and faculty shortages can be overcome at a ^{1/} proportionate pace.

Expansion Effort

Ten years ago Vietnam's educators and their advisers were faced with a formidable task when they embarked on their program to forge an entirely new educational system for the country, one that would meet the requirements of a newly independent nation instead of serving the needs of a colonial regime. At all levels, educational facilities were

^{1/} See Statistical Appendix, Table 1, for secondary school growth data. For data on higher education, see the Vietnam Feature Service releases (TCB-056) New horizons for THE UNIVERSITY OF HUE, September 1969; (TCB-050) Saigon's medical school . . . EDUCATING PHYSICIANS FOR VIETNAM, July 1969; (TCB-039) Education by and for the young . . . CAN THO UNIVERSITY, March 1969, and (Pubs-016) Forging a new system of EDUCATION IN VIETNAM, July 1968. For data on primary education, see the last cited release as well as (TCB-048) Primary education in Vietnam . . . SCHOOLS FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY, July 1969. Earlier data on secondary education also can be found in Pubs-016.

sadly deficient after a century of neglect. The Viet Cong were methodically destroying school buildings and terrorizing teachers and students alike. The national budget, strained by defense requirements, had little left for educational improvement. Many teachers were poorly trained, and there were far too few of them. There were not enough schools and textbooks were nonexistent.

But in one respect Vietnam's educators were fortunate. For centuries there had existed a traditional respect for education and a quest for knowledge at all levels of Vietnamese society. The Confucian ideal of free education for all was accepted in Vietnam long before the concept reached the Western world. Under Vietnamese imperial dynasties scholars felt an obligation to teach the young, and all villages had schools with well-qualified teachers. By the mid-19th century 80 percent of Vietnam's people were literate to a functional degree. But higher education, as tradition dictated, was reserved for the elite, the sons of the magistrates and the affluent elders.

The French occupation of Indochina, consolidated by the 1860s, brought an end to this mandarin system of education (although vestiges of Confucian teachings and imperial-type examinations persisted well into the 1920s). In place of Confucianism the French imposed an equally undemocratic colonial system of education. It was designed to produce a continuing supply of clerks, interpreters and minor bureaucrats who could be relied upon to perpetuate French political control and cultural influence. The needs of the masses were virtually ignored; within a generation after the French assumed control of education, only 5,000 pupils remained enrolled in primary schools. Whole generations lived out their lives in the nation's hamlets without educational opportunities. Literacy dropped by an estimated 50 percent (although statistics for that period are few and unreliable). University education was nonexistent. ^{2/}

^{2/} The University of Hanoi was not founded until 1918. The University of Saigon, its offshoot and the first university in South Vietnam, was not established until 1956. Subsequently two other national universities supported by governmental appropriations were opened in Hue and Can Tho. There also are two privately endowed universities now operating -- the Vien Dai Hoc in Dalat, run by the Catholics, and the Van Hanh in Saigon, run by the Buddhists. In October 1970 a university endowed by the Hoa Hao sect is scheduled to open in Long Xuyen, in the Mekong Delta's An Giang province. Like all other Vietnamese universities, it will depend for its faculty largely on "commuting" professors who use the national airline to spread their talents among many campuses.

Primary education became the privilege of the sons of the gentry, and secondary education combined French cultural indoctrination with training for clerkship under French administrators.

Withdrawal of the French released a pent-up demand for education. School enrollments soared, but Vietnamese educators and officials newly saddled with responsibility did not have the resources to adapt the French system to the needs of mass education. The expansion that took place in school enrollment thus had to come on top of the old colonial system, and problems multiplied. By 1960 it was evident a complete overhaul of the system was necessary. The alternative, according to an independent study made that year, was this: "Vietnam would continue to remain dependent on others for assistance, technological innovations would be slow to take hold, professional growth and development would remain unchanged, and the educational system would not be able to meet the pressing demands of the people and their government."

Primary Education First

With this forecast in mind, educators and their advisers set priorities. To build a broad educational base, they placed

emphasis first on primary education. Hundreds of primary schools were built in villages and hamlets throughout the country. Practically anyone of good moral character and the ability to read and write could qualify to teach at that time, so great was the desire for children to learn at least the basic elements of reading, writing and arithmetic. The needs of the country required a population with a basic education, people who could then help protect and rebuild their country.

As this goal of a system of primary education for all became more of a reality than a dream -- 82 percent of Vietnam's children now are enrolled in primary schools -- educators have turned more and more to secondary education in the past three years. While secondary education was not ignored in the first seven years of the accelerated expansion program, efforts were concentrated more on improving the quality of existing secondary education than on getting primary school graduates into high school. But now primary school graduates are being funnelled into secondary schools as rapidly as possible to meet the need for manpower development. The long-range need for

professionals -- both those who will become a part of the work force after graduation from secondary school and those who will go on to the universities and technical schools -- is shaping a multi-purpose educational system more responsive to the requirements of the total population.

Already great improvements have been made in secondary education, but much remains to be done. In the last three years alone, enrollment in secondary schools has increased markedly -- 471,000 in the 1967-68 school year, 554,000 the next year, 632,000 this year. Educators estimate that within the next decade the enrollment can reach 65 to 70 percent of the eligible population -- the highest that can be expected of a developing nation. But if this increased enrollment is to be achieved, there must be more schools, teachers, supplies and textbooks. And there must be a continuation of the present trend of growing security in the countryside.

In addition to boosting the number of students, educators are trying hard to improve the quality of secondary education through better trained teachers as well as innovations in curricula and teaching methods. The Minister of Education,

Dr. Nguyen Luu Vien, says: "We are trying to change our system according to what is happening around us in Southeast Asia and in the Far East." He says key changes will include decentralizing curriculum and financial responsibilities, introducing more "practical" curricula at elementary and secondary levels, and eliminating the rote memorization teaching method in favor of problem solving.

Two Cycles

After five years in primary school, students are eligible for secondary education consisting of two cycles (roughly corresponding to junior and senior high school in some Western nations): grades six through nine in the First Cycle, and grades 10 through 12 in the Second Cycle. Although both cycles often are taught under one roof, they operated independently of each other until this year and there was an evident lack of continuity. But as a result of President Nguyen Van Thieu's message to a joint session of the National Assembly on October 6, 1969, a decree was issued on December 1 that created a continuous, integrated, 12-year system of education rather than three distinct segments. Minister Vien says this is an important

reform that should encourage more students to continue their education to a higher level.

With present facilities it would be impossible for all primary students to continue on to high school -- there is simply no place for them. But in the past three years, most particularly in 1969, the Vietnamese government has made a concerted effort to build more classrooms. There are now 280 public high schools with 4, 500 classrooms. Eight hundred classrooms were built in the past year and hundreds more are programmed or already under construction. By comparison, in 1955 there were only 41 public high schools with 500 classes in all of South Vietnam.

This growth was made possible by a major increase in education's budget allotment -- 280 million piasters (US\$2, 372, 882 at the official exchange rate of 118 to US\$1) for secondary classroom construction in 1969 -- plus the untying of administrative red tape. Province chiefs and mayors were given authority to approve construction plans without having to go through Saigon government offices, and funds were transferred directly to them. As part of the decentralization drive designed

to spur more local involvement, Education Sectors have been created that will wield the authority previously held by Saigon to administer secondary schools. Local school committees are being established, made up of province and village leaders, to coordinate future construction plans.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Works have worked together on most secondary school construction projects, but others are helping too. Cadres of the Ministry of Rural Development, who have long played an important role in primary education, also have built 58 high school classrooms in the past three years and are planning 70 more. The villagers, too, are coming more and more to realize the need for local high schools. As part of the pacification program, villages with their own elected leaders are each given a central government grant of one million piasters to spend on the self-help development projects they consider most urgent. Throughout Vietnam many village councils have decided to build secondary school classrooms. By the end of 1969 some 80 such classrooms were completed with self-help funds, and plans for 200 more have been submitted to provincial councils for approval.

A voluntary group rapidly growing in membership, the Student-Parent Association (SPA), has responded to a request for help from the Ministry of Education (MOE). With 473,845 adult members and chapters in more than 2,000 villages, the SPA is financing the furnishing of 300 of the classrooms built by the MOE last year. This year local chapters are building and helping to finance 400 more classrooms. In the village of An Nhon, in Gia Dinh province near Saigon, a 13-million-piaster high school to accommodate 2,000 students recently was dedicated; financed through the village self-help budget, it ^{3/} was constructed by parents.

Many of the public high schools are overcrowded even though operating in double sessions. As more and more classrooms are completed, officials are trying to limit the size of classes to 60 students.

The best public high schools are in Saigon and other major population centers. Competition to enter them is fierce.

3/ The SPA is strongest in the Mekong Delta. Recently it has started bread and milk feeding programs, built 60 bridges, taken over the custodial care of many schools, and financed school libraries.

At the Gia Long Girls High School in Saigon, for instance, 8,000 took the entrance exam last term but only 819 could be admitted.

Private High Schools

Because public schools are so crowded, two-thirds of Vietnam's high school students attend private schools. There are 500 private secondary schools in the country now, compared with 92 in 1955. Many are French; others are endowed by Buddhists or Catholics. Until recently the MOE had little control over their curricula, but a Directorate of Private Education has been established to help coordinate the varied curricula so they follow more closely those of the public schools.

Tuition for private school education varies considerably; in some of Saigon's exclusive schools, it can be quite high. But indicating the value parents place on education, enough are paying tuition to enable the private secondary schools to increase the number of their classrooms from 600 to 6,400 in the past 15 years. A typical parent is a young Saigon widow who makes 8,000 piasters a month as a secretary. She is paying 2,000 piasters a month to send her 13-year-old daughter to a private

girls' school. "I grew up in Can Tho," she says, "and my parents could not send me to school. I want all of my three daughters to be able to get the education I could not have."

For those teenagers unable to be accommodated in public schools and unable to afford private tuition, semi-public schools are being built in some areas. Fees amount to half the average private tuition, and war orphans as well as children of needy families are admitted free. Quang Ngai province, in the northern part of the Republic, has built six semi-public high schools with a total enrollment of 3,000 students in 48 classes. Quang Ngai has four public high schools and five private high schools, but their enrollment of 20,000 has filled them to capacity. The semi-public schools thus are taking care of youngsters who otherwise would not be able to continue their educations.

Private citizens are beginning to help needy students on a more active basis than is customary in oriental countries where assistance usually is confined to members of the extended family or clan. Three years ago a group of professional people and businessmen in Saigon formed an organization to give

high school scholarships to students with high grades and good conduct records who are financially unable to continue school. Last year this group granted 15 full tuition scholarships and purchased books and school supplies for many other students. This year the group hopes to raise enough money to grant 50 scholarships.

Recruiting Teachers

Education's leaders realize new classrooms will be of no value if there are not enough teachers to fill them. Several programs have been instituted, not only to increase significantly the number of teachers, but also to meet the demand for more quality in their training. Since 1962, a team of special advisers from Ohio University has been assigned to the three faculties of pedagogy at Saigon, Hue and Can Tho Universities.

To qualify to teach, a First Cycle teacher must complete one year in Arts or Letters at a university, attend a faculty of pedagogy for one year, and then pass an examination. A Second Cycle teacher must attend a faculty of pedagogy for three years before taking the qualifying examination. Those who score highest on the exams may choose where they will teach.

Most choose Saigon; those at the bottom of the list are left with the more remote assignments -- some so undesirable that the appointees never show up to take their positions.

Since 1955, teachers in public high schools have increased from 800 to 4,800 and in private high schools from 1,100 to 11,400. But experts estimate that at least 1,500 more must be trained within the next three years.

Military service has taken many young men from the teaching ranks. Some subsequently have been released, but the shortage remains acute. Civil service laws also make it difficult to find teachers for all classrooms. As a Saigon educator explains, "If all qualified teachers were teaching fulltime, we would not have a problem. But under civil service regulations, a First Cycle teacher is required to teach only 18 hours a week and a Second Cycle teacher only 16. For this a teacher makes an average of 11,000 piasters a month. The government cannot require them to teach more hours without increasing salaries, and it does not have the funds to do that." As a result, many teachers hold two or more jobs. It is not unusual for a teacher to spend

two days at one school teaching his required 18 hours, then teach at another school for the rest of the week for an additional salary. Some move from town to town in the course of a week's teaching. "Secondary schools are better off than the universities, though," says the educator. "Professors are required to teach only three hours a week." ^{4/}

An accelerated First Cycle teacher education program was started in 1969 at the faculties of pedagogy in Saigon and Can Tho. A student attends for eight months, then teaches for a year at a salary of 6,000 piasters a month. He goes back to the faculty of pedagogy for four months, then teaches another year at 7,000 piasters a month. He returns to the faculty for a final four months and then takes the exam to qualify as a First Cycle teacher. Five hundred teachers a year for the next three years are scheduled to enter this program.

Changing Curricula

Changing curricula and teaching methods is a high-priority project of the MOE and its advisers. Until

^{4/} Of Hue University's 205 professors, for instance, 145 are visiting or "suitcase" professors who commute among the various campuses.

this year, only four curricula were offered to secondary school students: modern literature, classical literature, mathematical science, and experimental science. Teachers traditionally have sat on a raised platform and lectured while students took copious notes that they were expected to memorize. As one adviser points out, "High school students never learned to reason or solve problems. Everything they learned was by memorization. There was never any class discussion between teacher and student. As a result Vietnamese students did well in history and languages, but poorly in social studies and science. These subjects cannot be learned or understood by just memorizing facts." Nor did the curricula do much to prepare a student for everyday life. ^{5/}

This year curricula are being expanded experimentally to include home economics, industrial arts, agriculture and business administration. Says Minister Vien: "We observed that under the old system, what a student learned had almost

^{5/} Indicating that memorized facts do not stick in a student's mind too long, the 12th grade Baccalaureate II exam in 1969 was passed by only 23.18 percent.

nothing to do with real life. Students who completed secondary school had some academic knowledge, it's true, but no skills."

The new programs, which are started at the primary level and continued in the secondary cycles, should help youngsters understand their local environment and how to live with it.

To introduce new discussion teaching methods and practical curricula to teachers, 17 workshops were organized in 1969 for more than 1,000 teachers. Teachers as well as high school principals have been sent to universities in the United States, the Philippines and the Republic of China to learn new methods and observe them in operation.

To develop comprehensive programs that include more than classroom studies, the MOE has started 12 pilot schools and two demonstration schools attached to the faculties of pedagogy. The model is the Thu Duc Demonstration High School on the outskirts of Saigon. Completed on March 30, 1964, at a cost of 40 million piasters, it will graduate its first class next year. Says the school's dean, Dr. Tran Van Tan: "It is the philosophy of the school to provide a secondary education consistent with students' individual interests and abilities so

they can rightfully assume their roles as contributing members in a free, democratic Vietnamese society." The school, which also serves as a laboratory for student teachers, offers a strong academic program and a wide choice of electives in practical arts. And the students have extracurricular activities. There is football for the boys and badminton for the girls, a choir and drama club, weekend camping trips, and a student council.

The comprehensive pilot schools, situated throughout the country, now enroll almost 30,000 students. Although all 12 do not offer a full program of electives yet, practical arts courses are being added as the necessary equipment and teachers become available. In 1969, American aid provided 28,700,000 piasters to build 42 laboratories and classrooms for these schools. For the first time students are getting practical experience with kitchen equipment, sewing machines, woodworking machines and typewriters. And science courses are much more interesting now that students can experiment in their own laboratories.

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STATISTICAL APPENDIX

Table 1

Student Enrollment
in Secondary Schools,
Republic of Vietnam
1954-1970
(Selected years)

<u>School year</u>	<u>Public school enrollment</u>	<u>Private school enrollment</u>	<u>Total enrollment</u>	<u>Percent of age group</u>
1954-55	27,700	25,800	53,500	3
1961-62	85,600	142,800	228,400	11
1965-66	132,900	237,700	370,600	16
1966-67	146,500	270,400	416,900	18
1967-68	163,000	308,000	471,000	20
1968-69	190,000	364,000	554,000	23
1969-70	229,000	403,000	632,000	25

Table 2

Teachers Employed
in Secondary Schools,
Republic of Vietnam
1954-1970
(Selected years)

<u>School year</u>	<u>Public school teachers</u>	<u>Private school teachers</u>	<u>Total</u>
1954-55	800	1,100	1,900
1961-62	2,100	5,500	7,600
1965-66	2,600	7,300	9,900
1966-67	2,800	7,400	10,200
1967-68	3,200	8,300	11,500
1968-69	4,200	9,900	14,100
1969-70	4,800	11,400	16,200

Table 3

Secondary Schools,
Republic of Vietnam
1954-1970
(Selected years)

<u>School year</u>	<u>Public schools</u>	<u>Private schools</u>	<u>Total</u>
1954-55	41	92	133
1961-62	101	373	474
1965-66	171	434	605
1966-67	197	447	644
1967-68	199	462	661
1968-69	230	495	725
1969-70	280	500	780

Table 4

Secondary School Classes,
Republic of Vietnam
1954-1970
(Selected years)

<u>School year</u>	<u>Public classes</u>	<u>Private classes</u>	<u>Total</u>
1954-55	500	600	1,100
1961-62	1,600	2,700	4,300
1965-66	2,600	3,800	6,400
1966-67	2,900	4,000	6,900
1967-68	3,300	4,800	8,100
1968-69	3,700	5,900	9,600
1969-70	4,500	6,400	10,900

SOURCE: U.S. AID Saigon.