

## Learn about some advantages and disadvantages of applying montessori education method in Vietnam

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**ABSTRACT :** As an influential educator in the twentieth century, Montessori created education method which has been applied in many countries around the world, including Vietnam. Applying the Montessori method has many advantages such as the education promotion policies of the Communist Party of Vietnam and the State, an easy-to-receive mentality as well as the variety and diversity of documents. However, applying Montessori method also faces disadvantages such as the shortage and non-uniformity of facilities and teachers; the suitability and compatibility with local education and scientific assessments on the effects and impacts of this education method in Vietnam

**Keywords -** Maria Montessori, Montessori education method, Montessori education method in Vietnam

### I. INTRODUCTION

After the great victory in the Spring of 1975 and especially after the Renovation in 1986, under the leadership of the Communist Party, Vietnam made many efforts to keep pace with the development of the countries in the region and around the world. One of the areas where many changes and achievements have been made is education. Inheriting and developing Ho Chi Minh's ideology on education, the Communist Party of Vietnam has always persisted in the goal of comprehensive human development. With the aim of building an advanced education, learning the ideas of major educators in the world has an important role and meaning to Vietnamese education. Through studying advanced and influential educational concepts in the world, Vietnamese educators can find out an educational philosophy appropriate to the country's situation but not separate from the general trend of the time. As an influential educator in the twentieth century, Maria Montessori's educational ideology has attracted many researchers in Vietnam. Not only studying, her educational ideas and method have also been applied into practice with a series of Montessori schools built in Vietnam. This article focuses on analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of applying Montessori education method in Vietnam in the current times.

### II. CONTENTS

#### 2.1. About life and educational career of Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori was born on August 31, 1870 in Chiaravalle town, Italy. From an early age, Maria Montessori broke the usual barriers when enrolling in subjects normally for boys. After graduating from high school, her family encouraged her to become a teacher, but she determined to enter medical school to become a doctor. Through many hardships, she was admitted to the University of Rome in 1890 and six years later, in July 1896, she graduated and became the first female doctor in Italy [6]. This was an important start to Maria Montessori's later educational career.

After the graduation, Maria Montessori joined the treatment to the patients with competence and respect for patients of all social classes. In 1897, she joined a research program at the University of Rome's psychiatric clinic as a volunteer. With this work, Maria Montessori began to deeply care about the learning needs of disabled children. In 1901, she spent time studying educational philosophy and anthropology. From 1904 to 1908, she was a lecturer at the College of Education at the University of Rome [6]. During this period,

Rome developed rapidly in terms of economy, but the downside of this development was also revealed, in which the most severely affected and injured subject was children.

In 1907, Maria Montessori founded the first Casa dei Bambini (Children's House) in a poor Italian neighborhood to educate the children. There, she observed that children were completely fascinated by objects and materials designed to aid sensory perception. She found that when children were placed in an environment where activities were designed to support natural development, they became passionate about discovery and tended to express their own special abilities. By 1909, Maria Montessori had conducted training courses for about 100 students based on the view that it was necessary to create an appropriate educational environment and to respect the distinct characteristics of the children [6]. She then devoted her time and dedication to the research and development as well as realization of her own education method commonly known as the Montessori method.

Maria Montessori died on May 6, 1952, in the Netherlands. Her educational career continues thanks to the activities of the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) - an organization she founded in 1929. With the motto: "Connecting Montessori to the world", the Association aims to train teachers and teaching assistants, research the curriculum and develop the Montessori method all over the world. [13]. Besides, her educational viewpoint is also popularized thanks to the contributions of many teachers, schools around the world applying her education methods and viewpoint, including Vietnam.

### **2.2. Montessori education method**

With a desire to help all children become truly capable and productive individuals, Maria Montessori aimed to the comprehensive education by focusing on ethical, behavioral, emotional and intellectual development for children. To achieve the aforementioned goal, Maria Montessori emphasized the important role of teachers, the education environment and the education method.

The education method developed by Maria Montessori is based on a comprehensive approach to education. Her education method attempts to combine the values of the human spirit and the children's comprehensive development in physical, mental, emotional and cognitive terms. She summarized her educational method based on what to do with children as follows "Repetition of the exercise; Free choice; Control of error; Analysis of movements; Good manners in social contracts; Order in the environment; Care for personal cleanliness; Training of the senses; Writing before reading; Reading without books; Discipline in free activity". Besides, there are some things should not be done: "Rewards and punishments; Spellers; Lesson in common; Programs and examinations; Toys and sweets; A teacher's desk" [5,p.138-139].

In traditional education, parents and teachers always orient the child that: "In their dealings with children adults do not become egotistic but egocentric. They look upon everything pertaining to a child's soul from their own point of view and, consequently their misapprehensions are constantly on the increase. Because of the egocentric view, adults look upon a child as something empty that is to be filled through their own efforts, as something inert and helpless for which they must do everything, as something lacking an inner guide and in constant need of direction. In conclusion we may say that the adult looks upon himself as the child's creator and judges the child's actions as good or bad from the viewpoint of his own relations with the child" [5,p.16]. The Montessori method considers education as a release of the child's inner potential rather than trying to cram knowledge and experience from the outside. Therefore, the Montessori curriculum focuses on real-life exercises, mathematical thinking development and cultural lessons. Lessons in the Montessori schools are supposed to support children in developing motor skills and motor coordination, training the independence, control and confidence to create order. Activities at school are a part of everyday life, related to taking care of the surrounding environment as well as the children themselves. In addition, the education program also helps children to explore symbols, shapes, quantities and sizes. For sensory development, cognitive exercises through materials are harmoniously arranged through the comprehensive development of the senses. Cultural lessons include social, geographic, historical and scientific studies. Education is divided into small segments appropriate to each age so that children can learn concepts easily.

With great contributions to education, especially the children education, Maria Montessori opened a new era in education: respect children's personality and independence; education has the duty to elicit potentials in children instead of cramming, imposing social notions or prejudices on them. To realize and prove the correctness of her thoughts, she worked tirelessly to create schools and train teachers following the motto she herself pointed out. Over time, Maria Montessori's perspectives on comprehensive education have been experimentally tested and proven by a series of Montessori schools established all around the world. In Vietnam, Montessori schools have been also established and the "Montessori method" has become an attractive and effective educational method.

### **2.3. Advantages of applying the Montessori method in Vietnam**

*The first one is the education promotion policies of the Party and State.*

The year of 1986 marked a new period in Vietnamese history, the Renovation proposed and carried out by the Communist Party of Vietnam had a strong impact on many fields, including education. Right from that

time, the issue of educational innovation was raised and implemented. In the next Party congresses, education was concerned and considered as an important factor to promote the integration and development of Vietnam. In the 12th National Congress of Delegates, the Communist Party of Vietnam affirmed: "Education development is the leading national policy" [3, p.114], and at the same time launched the policy: "Educating Vietnamese people to develop comprehensively and brings into full practice the creative potentials and capabilities of each individual; to love their family, Fatherland and countrymen; to live well and work effectively. We keep striving so that by the year of 2030, Vietnam's education will have reached the advanced level in the region" [3,p.115].

In addition, the Party and State have always encouraged and considered education to be the cause of the entire people, creating conditions to maximize the role and contribution of the people to the educational renovation. Article 16 of Vietnam's "Education Law" states: "The State plays a key role in developing the cause of education. They diversify types of educational institutions and forms of education; encourage, mobilize and facilitate organizations and individuals to participate in educational development; encourage the development of private educational institutions to meet social demands for high-quality education" [8,p.6].

With the institutionalization into law, building and applying new and advanced education methods which have been encouraged have facilitated the expansion of the network of educational schools using Montessori education methods in Vietnam. In the appendix of "Maria Montessori: life and career" translation, translator Nguyen Bao Trung gives the figure: "Montessori began to appear in Vietnam since 2003. In our country, there are about 50-70 private kindergartens applying Montessori model to teach in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City to Hai Phong, Quang Ninh, Thai Binh ... " [7,p.613]. However, in our opinion, the number of Montessori schools in Vietnam may be even more and the popularity of this method is not only limited to schools named Montessori but also in many schools applying it partially or directing their educational goals to Montessori's educational perspectives.

*Secondly, the easy-to-receive mentality is a favorable condition for the Montessori method to be popularized in Vietnam.*

With a geographical position "located in the middle of Southeast Asia", a gateway to enter Southeast Asia from India and China, long ago Vietnamese people exchanged and acculturated with the culture of countries in the region such as China, India and many Western countries. The exchange and acculturation process was based on the principle of choosing appropriate values along with the rearrangement to suit the national conception. When studying the spiritual values and the national personalities, researchers all agree on common values such as: patriotism; resilience, attachment to the homeland; deep consciousness of the ego, the spirit of community cohesion; industriousness, hardship endurance, gratitude; flexible and soft behavior; abilities to adapt and integrate ... [9,p.95-99]. Psychological characteristic of being "easy to adapt and integrate" has made Vietnamese people easily approach to new things, including educational ideas and methods of countries around the world. This explains why the Montessori method has become popular, becoming a familiar concept that most educators have heard or known although it has just appeared in Vietnam for nearly 20 years. Parents are not too unfamiliar with this method and accept their children to study in schools named Montessori or applying Montessori education method.

*Thirdly, there are many documents about Montessori and Montessori method available in Vietnam.*

Currently, most of Montessori's important works on education have been translated and published in Vietnam. Some notable works such as: The Absorbent Mind, The Secret of Childhood, The Child in the Family, Education and peace, The Montessori Method, The advanced Montessori method... have also been reprinted. In the basic search of the National Library of Vietnam, with the keyword Montessori, we could find nearly 100 results in printed books [10], not to mention digital and internet documents. Diverse and abundant sources of information help readers easily access and learn about the Montessori education methods, from which they can apply these knowledge to the children education in Vietnam.

In addition, the establishment of Montessori Vietnam Association (MVA) has also played a great role in motivating and promoting the Montessori method to be closer to the Vietnamese education system. Sharing the same mission with Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), MVA has many activities in order to connect the development of the Montessori education method for Vietnamese as well as international Montessori community with specific contents monthly implemented. MVA has co-organized training programs for Montessori teachers; connected administrators to teachers and employees who need to work in the Montessori environment and Montessori schools, Montessori centers to Montessori organizations. MVA has also coordinated to organize and set up equipment and learning tools according to the AMI international Montessori class model for the ages of 0-3 and 3-6 years old [11]. With these strenuous activities, MVA has contributed to building a team of Montessori teachers, establishing schools in accordance with international Montessori standards, contributing to the creation of Montessori school system presenting in most of the cities and provinces in Vietnam.

With the aforementioned advantages, the Montessori method is becoming a promising education method developing in Vietnam. Facilitating with supporting education policies, a growing concern in children

education and a desire to keep up with the world's educational trends are important levers to help the Montessori approach be widely disseminated and have more influence on education in Vietnam today.

#### **2.4. Disadvantages of applying the Montessori method in Vietnam**

*Firstly, the facilities of the Montessori schools have not really met the requirements of the Montessori method*

One thing that cannot be denied in Maria Montessori's education method is the educational environment, including educational spaces and educational tools. Each Montessori classroom should be designed to support children's intellectual, physical, emotional and social development through active exploration, choice, and independence in learning.

However, in Vietnam today, the facilities and equipment have not basically met the requirements of fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education. This is also acknowledged by administrators. In the past few years, although many efforts have been made to improve the above situation, basically there have not been many profound changes. The education levels from kindergarten to high school are overwhelmed by the large number of students, while the school space is quite limited, especially for private schools. Moreover, in Vietnam, the Montessori educational method is just mainly applied in private kindergartens. Although there are preferential policies for education, the pressure on the premises to build schools is a significant factor affecting the Montessori's educational environment.

In addition to the space factor, teaching aids are also a problem in Montessori schools. Due to a large quantity of high-priced teaching aids, verified for each age and class, many schools cannot meet this requirement. This also greatly affects the efficiency and comprehensiveness when applying Montessori method in Vietnam.

*Secondly, the shortage of teachers, especially Montessori teachers, affects the teaching at Montessori schools.*

With a specific education method, Maria Montessori opened her own teacher training classes, not accepting teachers trained from other pedagogical schools. That means in order to become a Montessori teacher, learners must participate in a private training course and be granted with an international Montessori certificate. The requirement for the number and qualifications of teachers is also a big problem in Vietnam today.

However, in Vietnam, the shortage of teachers, especially qualified teachers is not new. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam in the conclusion No. 51-KL/TW dated May 30, 2019 also stated: "A part of teachers are low-qualified, a few teachers violate professional ethics; the structure of teachers in some places is irrational, lacking partially, especially in terms of preschool teachers" [2]. In addition, in Vietnam, the Montessori teacher training classes are quite limited. According to our research, Centre for International Education of VNUHCM-University of Social Sciences and Humanities - an official partner of AMI since 2012 - often hold Introductory Montessori courses to train teachers [12]. Besides, there are some other centers and organizations but we still do not have an official and methodical system of training Montessori teachers. Most Montessori schools still use teachers trained from Pedagogical schools, who then are supplemented with a few short-term courses to teach. This is a huge obstacle to the teaching of Montessori in Vietnam. To apply this method effectively, first of all, it is required that a team of Montessori teachers must be trained well and formally.

*Thirdly, Montessori education objectives and methods are different from traditional Vietnamese educational conceptions.*

Traditional Vietnamese education was heavily influenced by Chinese education, often taking Chinese classics as standards. The goal of education was not to develop individuals, but to attain the position of mandarin, bringing glory to families and line. Cultural researcher Dao Duy Anh said: "The habit of respecting literature, loving fiction has become a divine nature of our people. With that kind of education, even many brilliant natural people have to be discouraged, let alone ordinary people, it is an education that kills personality" [1,p.240]. Although after the independence of the country (1945), modern-style education had many changes, the influences from feudal and colonial education still remained.

With education in respect of children's individuality and independence, evoking potentials in children instead of cramming and imposing social notions or prejudices on them, in general the Montessori method is still quite new and need a long time to reconcile to be suitable to the actual educational situation of Vietnam today.

*Fourthly, there are currently no full assessments of the impacts, differences or values that the Montessori education method has created in Vietnam.*

According to our research, there is currently no general report or comparison based on the actual results on the differences between the group of children using the Montessori method and ones using the normal education method. Although the Montessori education method has been introduced and applied in Vietnam for nearly 20 years, there is still no effective controlled comparison of this method in Vietnam. This stems from a number of reasons such as: Montessori schools have not really applied the Montessori education method

completely due to the barriers of the facilities and teachers mentioned above; moreover, the Montessori method in Vietnam is mainly applied in the preschool level, to the next level of education, it returns to the normal education method due to the shortage of an inter-level schools system unifying the education method. Another reason comes from mechanically applying the Montessori method without in-depth, research on the compatibility of this method to the traditional education method to create a Montessori method suitable to the practice of Vietnam. In our opinion, this is an important reason to find out that although it has been implemented for many years in Vietnam, the Montessori method is only at a trendy level, attracting the attention of parents, yet creating a breakthrough in the children education in Vietnam

### III. CONCLUSION

In the recent years, a series of Montessori schools have been opened in Vietnam shows that Maria Montessori's education method is becoming an education method attracting the attention of parents and researchers. With the advantages from the policies of the Party and State, along with the support from parents and people interested in the education industry, the Montessori method can be disseminated and bring into play positive values for education career in Vietnam. However, in order for this method to really bring a more pronounced effect in the education and training of the young generation in the country, there is still a need for overall and comprehensive solutions from educational managers, parents and researchers.

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