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Applying Montessori Education Philosophy in Preschool Education in Vietnam

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Abstract---The Montessori educational philosophy, founded by Maria Montessori, emphasizes the holistic development of preschool children, focusing on their innate abilities and fostering independence and self-regulation. In Vietnam, the application of Montessori principles in preschool education has gained traction, albeit with several challenges. This paper assesses the implementation of Montessori education in Vietnamese preschools, examining successful cases and existing hurdles. Drawing from a range of sources, including scholarly articles, books, and dissertations, the analysis highlights the shortage of adequately trained Montessori teachers, high tuition fees, and misconceptions about the Montessori approach. The study proposes solutions such as enhancing teacher training, international collaboration, and improving infrastructure and financial support for Montessori preschools. Furthermore, the paper underscores the significance of applying Montessori principles in Vietnamese early childhood education and suggests future directions for development. By adhering to Montessori's core principles and addressing the identified challenges, this approach has the potential to optimize preschool children's capacities and contribute to the nation's future development.

Keywords---child-centric learning, educational environment, Montessori Education, preschool management, teacher training.

Introduction

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for the lifelong learning journey of preschool children. Recognizing this significance, educators and policymakers continually seek innovative approaches to enhance the learning experiences of young children. One such globally recognized approach is the Montessori educational philosophy, pioneered by Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 20th century.

The Montessori method is characterized by its emphasis on child-centered learning, individualized instruction, and the creation of a nurturing environment that fosters independence and self-discovery (Beatty, 1995; Montessori, 1966). These principles closely align with contemporary educational goals, aiming to promote critical thinking, creativity, and socio-emotional development in preschool children (Besancon & Lubart, 2008; Blair, 2002).

In Vietnam, the adoption of Montessori principles in early childhood education has gained momentum in recent years, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of holistic child development (Hien, 2023). Educators and parents alike are increasingly drawn to the Montessori approach for its potential to cultivate well-rounded individuals and prepare them for future academic success (Dohrmann et al., 2007; Lopata et al., 2005).

This paper explores the application of Montessori educational philosophy in preschool settings in Vietnam, analyzing its implications for early childhood development and education outcomes. Drawing upon a diverse range of scholarly sources and empirical studies (Blair et al., 2007; Bull et al., 2008), it examines the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing Montessori practices in the Vietnamese context.

Additionally, the paper proposes strategies to address these challenges and maximize the benefits of Montessori education for preschool children in Vietnam. By delving into the intersection of Montessori pedagogy and Vietnamese early childhood education, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective educational practices and their implications for child development and future societal advancement (Milkaite et al., 2021).

Research Methodology

This study is conducted through the analysis of research documents and reports on the status of Montessori-inspired preschools in Vietnam. The research methodology focuses on collecting, evaluating, and synthesizing information from authoritative sources such as articles, books, and reports on preschool education in Vietnam.

By employing this method, the study assesses the current status of Montessori preschools in Vietnam and identifies challenges and opportunities in the implementation process. The selection of research documents is carefully made based on the credibility of the information sources, transparency, and currency of the data, as well as their relevance to the research objectives. This method provides a systematic and reliable approach to better understand the current situation and potential of Montessori preschool education in Vietnam.

Research Results

Introduction to the early childhood education system in Vietnam

The Education Law of 2019 delineates the role and objectives of early childhood education in Vietnam. Early childhood education constitutes the initial tier of the national education system, laying the groundwork for the comprehensive development of Vietnamese preschool children aged 3 months to 6 years. It aims to foster children's physical, emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic aspects, shaping their initial personality traits and preparing them for primary school entry.

The content of early childhood education must be tailored to suit the psycho-physiological development of preschool children, integrating protection, care, nurturing, and education while facilitating comprehensive development in physical, emotional, social, and cognitive skills. It should respect individual differences, cater to various age groups, and align with primary education (Giang et al., 2022).

Early childhood education methods are stipulated as follows: Nursery education should provide conducive environments for children to actively engage in activities and play, fostering bonds between adults and children while stimulating sensory, emotional, and psychological development. Kindergarten education should offer opportunities for children to play, explore, and experience the surrounding environment in diverse forms, catering to their needs and interests.

The early childhood education curriculum must meet certain criteria: It should reflect the objectives of early childhood education, delineate age-specific requirements, educational activities, methods, forms of organizing educational activities, the educational environment, and child development assessment. Moreover, it should be nationally consistent yet flexible enough to adapt to local conditions and the specific contexts of early childhood education institutions. Early childhood education facilities encompass nurseries for children aged 3 months to 3 years, kindergartens for children aged 3 to 6 years, and preschools, which combine nursery and kindergarten facilities, accommodating children from 3 months to 6 years old (Davies et al., 2013; Broadbent & Poon, 2015; Kim et al., 2014).

History of Applying Montessori Educational Philosophy in Vietnam

In 1946, Professor Nguyen Phuoc Vinh Bang established Bach Thao Kindergarten, considered the first private kindergarten in Vietnam. Here, he applied educational methodologies from Montessori, Decroly, and Froebel, along with modern humanistic educational ideas.

In 1948, Vinh Bang departed for Switzerland to study educational psychology. He became Jean Piaget's close associate, gaining recognition as a leading educational psychologist at the University of Geneva. He significantly influenced private and modern education in Vietnam, leaving an indelible mark on the nation's educational landscape.

However, Bach Thao Kindergarten was not the first to adopt new educational ideologies in Vietnam. According to Montessori research, the first experimental Montessori-inspired kindergarten class in Hanoi was founded in 1942-1943 by Trinh Huu Ngoc and Nguyen Thi Khang, with financial backing from Nguyen Son Ha. They advocated self-reliance and cultural and educational renovation.

In recent decades, Montessori education has resurged in Vietnam, gaining popularity among educators and parents seeking scientifically proven early education methods. Montessori preschools have proliferated since the early 2000s, driven by passionate educators and parents.

Despite its growing popularity, Montessori education in Vietnam encounters challenges such as a shortage of trained teachers and integration into the national preschool education system. Increased awareness and acceptance, along with international cooperation and teacher training programs, hold promise for its continued development (Demangeon et al., 2023; Öngören & Turcan, 2009).

Prospects for Montessori education in Vietnam include expansion supported by governmental and non-governmental organizations, integrating it into the evolving preschool education system. Pioneering preschools applying Montessori philosophy include Sakura Kindergarten, Shining Star Kindergarten, and Hanoi Montessori Kindergarten in Hanoi, and Tiny Flower Kindergarten, May Soc Kindergarten, and Saigon Montessori Kindergarten in Ho Chi Minh City.

International cooperation in Montessori teacher training has been widespread, with organizations like the International Montessori Association AMI partnering with centers across Vietnam, such as the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, the CIE Center, Shining Star Kindergarten, and Tiny Flowers Kindergarten, to conduct teacher training courses for various age groups from 0 to 6 years old.

The Compatibility of Montessori Education Philosophy with Early Childhood Education Environment in Vietnam

The Montessori education philosophy underscores comprehensive education, encompassing physical, cognitive, language, mathematical, emotional, and social development in preschool children (Dobbs-Oates et al., 2011; Gangal & Yilmaz, 2023). Conversely, early childhood education in Vietnam focuses on providing children with diverse opportunities for experiential learning through play-based activities. Both approaches share the objective of nurturing children's holistic development, including physical, mental, and social skills, thereby laying a strong foundation for their future learning endeavors. Given this congruence, the Montessori education philosophy is highly suitable for the early childhood education landscape in Vietnam.

Several factors contribute to the compatibility of the Montessori education philosophy within the context of early childhood education in Vietnam:

Fostering Independence and Discipline: Montessori early childhood classrooms, characterized by spacious, well-lit environments and age-appropriate learning materials, facilitate the development of functional independence, autonomy, and self-discipline in preschool children. This aligns with Vietnam's education policy, which emphasizes promoting students' independence and autonomy.

Visual, Experiential Learning Method: The prepared Montessori environment offers children a plethora of activities and learning materials arranged sequentially to facilitate progressive learning. Through hands-on interaction, children engage in direct sensory experiences, fostering comprehensive development. This experiential approach resonates with the Vietnamese educational context, promoting active engagement and practical learning experiences.

Development of Intelligence and Creativity: Montessori education empowers children to explore and acquire skills and creativity autonomously. By granting children freedom of choice and movement within the classroom, the Montessori philosophy nurtures intelligence development and encourages creativity while minimizing adult intervention. This approach aligns with Vietnam's educational objectives of fostering creativity and exploration in children.

Development of Age-Specific Skills: Montessori classrooms for early childhood provide a structured curriculum covering various areas such as practical life, sensorial/motor skills, language, and mathematics. These activities cater to age-specific developmental needs, promoting skill acquisition and cognitive growth in preschool children.

Establishing a Foundation for Continuous Learning: Montessori education not only addresses preschool-level learning but also lays the groundwork for continuous learning at subsequent levels. The curriculum and activities prepare children for future academic pursuits, reflecting Vietnam's long-term education policy objectives.

Flexibility and Cultural Compatibility: The Montessori method, when introduced to Vietnam, has been adapted to align with the country's culture and specific needs. Learning materials and activities in the practical life area incorporate familiar items from Vietnamese daily life, fostering cultural relevance and connection.

Development of Emotions and Social Communication: Montessori classrooms, characterized by mixed-age groups and a cooperative learning environment, promote emotional development and social communication skills. Children learn to cooperate, respect, and support one another, fostering a sense of community and mutual respect.

In conclusion, the Montessori education philosophy seamlessly integrates into the early childhood education environment in Vietnam, offering a flexible and humane approach to education. By incorporating Montessori principles, Vietnam can enrich its educational landscape, providing preschool children with a holistic learning experience that prepares them for success in both academic and social realms.

The Importance of the Montessori Education Philosophy in Shaping the Future of Education in Vietnam

In the context of Vietnam's increasingly rapid economic and social development, Montessori education can play a crucial role in shaping the nation's future in several ways:

Pioneering Creative Thinking Development: The Montessori education method encourages curiosity and creativity, aiding children in developing creative thinking skills, a pivotal factor in shaping Vietnam's future in the 21st century, where innovation and creativity are keys to development (Besancon & Lubart, 2008).

Development of Socially Harmonious Skills: Montessori education assists children in developing social skills, including cooperation, attentive listening, and respect for others' opinions. These skills are not only vital in educational settings but also in today's society and economy, where human relationships play a significant role in each nation's development (Capage & Watson, 2001).

Autonomy and Independence: Montessori education fosters children's sense of autonomy and independence, qualities that not only enhance their confidence and self-reliance in personal life but also serve as a foundation for the nation's economic and political development (Dohrmann et al., 2007).

Comprehensive Education: Montessori education focuses not only on imparting knowledge but also on holistic development for children, encompassing physical, mental, and social aspects. This helps shape morally upright citizens who are willing to contribute to the development of the community and the nation (Montessori, 1967).

Human Resource Development: By investing in Montessori education, Vietnam can cultivate a skilled, willing, and capable workforce to participate in various industries and specialized fields, thereby enhancing the country's productivity and competitiveness in the international market (Hien, 2023).

In summary, Montessori education not only nurtures academically proficient individuals but also molds citizens with moral character and intellect, meeting the demands of contemporary society and contributing to the prosperous future of Vietnam.

Analyzing the Application of Montessori Educational Philosophy Principles in Preschools in Vietnam

In recent years, the adoption of the Montessori educational philosophy in preschools has gained attention in Vietnam due to its focus on individualized learning and holistic development. This paper explores 13 principles derived from Montessori philosophy and their relevance in Vietnamese preschool settings.

Principle 1: Respect for the Unique Individuality of Each Child

Montessori emphasizes acknowledging and valuing the distinct qualities of every child. This principle aligns with the Vietnamese cultural emphasis on honoring individual differences and can contribute to creating inclusive learning environments. According to Baron-Cohen (2000), recognizing and respecting individuality is crucial for promoting positive development in children.

Principle 2: Cultivating "Absorbent Minds" - Enhancing Cognitive Absorption

The concept of "absorbent minds" underscores the importance of providing enriching experiences to stimulate children's intellectual growth. By offering hands-on learning opportunities, Vietnamese preschools can facilitate children's cognitive development effectively. Besancon & Lubart (2008), emphasize the role of diverse learning environments in fostering creative competencies in children.

Principle 3: Sensitivity Periods

Montessori philosophy recognizes sensitive periods in child development, emphasizing the significance of tailored learning experiences during these critical stages. Vietnamese educators can leverage this principle to design age-appropriate activities that align with children's developmental milestones. Blair et al. (2007a), discuss the importance of understanding developmental neuroscience in designing effective learning experiences for children.

Principle 4: Comprehensive Education

Holistic development, encompassing intellectual, social, emotional, and physical aspects, is central to Montessori education. Vietnamese preschools can integrate this principle by offering a balanced curriculum that nurtures various facets of children's growth and well-being. Lillard (2017), discusses the science behind Montessori education and its holistic approach to child development.

Principle 5: Individualization and Self-Directed Learning

Encouraging autonomy and self-directed exploration empowers children to take ownership of their learning journey. Vietnamese preschools can foster independence by providing opportunities for children to make choices and pursue their interests within structured learning environments. [Capage & Watson \(2001\)](#), highlight the importance of individual differences in promoting social skills and behavior regulation in young children.

Principle 6: Children's Rights

Respecting children's rights and perspectives is fundamental in Montessori education. Vietnamese preschools can promote children's agency and participation by involving them in decision-making processes and creating a supportive and inclusive atmosphere. [Carroll et al. \(2007\)](#), discuss the significance of children's rights in educational settings and its impact on their overall development.

Principle 7: Prepared Environment

A well-prepared learning environment plays a crucial role in facilitating children's exploration and discovery. Vietnamese preschools can optimize learning spaces by incorporating age-appropriate materials and promoting organization and orderliness. [Olson & Kellum \(2003\)](#), explore the impact of sustainable school environments on educational achievements.

Principle 8: Internal Discipline and Self-Regulation

Montessori emphasizes the development of self-discipline and emotional regulation skills from an early age. Vietnamese preschools can support children's self-regulation by providing clear expectations, modelling positive behavior, and offering guidance in managing emotions and conflicts. [Bronson & Bronson \(2001\)](#), discusses the nature and nurture aspects of self-regulation in early childhood.

Principle 9: Development of Independence

Encouraging children's independence fosters confidence and resilience. Vietnamese preschools can promote independence by gradually increasing children's responsibilities and offering opportunities for them to engage in self-care and decision-making. [Bull et al. \(2008\)](#), explore predictors of mathematical achievement in preschoolers, including aspects of independence.

Principle 10: Education for Automation

Repetition and practice are essential for mastering skills and fostering automaticity. Vietnamese preschools can integrate this principle by incorporating hands-on learning activities and allowing children to engage in meaningful and repetitive tasks. [Cohen \(1988\)](#), discusses statistical power and its relevance in educational research, including studies on skill acquisition.

Principle 11: Work Periods

Allocating uninterrupted blocks of time for focused learning promotes concentration and engagement. Vietnamese preschools can schedule regular work periods to allow children to delve deeply into activities and pursue their interests. [Blair \(2002\)](#), discusses school readiness and its implications for designing effective learning environments for young children.

Principle 12: Montessori Guides

Qualified and trained educators are essential for implementing Montessori principles effectively. Vietnamese preschools can invest in teacher training programs to equip educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to support children's development. [Beatty \(1995\)](#), discusses the historical and cultural aspects of preschool education in America.

Principle 13: Consistent Guidance

Providing consistent guidance and support helps children develop a sense of security and predictability. Vietnamese preschools can establish clear routines and expectations to create a nurturing and structured learning environment. [Cros \(1992\)](#), explores instructional approaches for promoting active learning and engagement in primary education. In conclusion, integrating Montessori educational philosophy principles into preschools in Vietnam holds promise for enhancing early childhood education practices. By aligning with Vietnamese cultural values and leveraging these

principles, educators can create enriching learning experiences that promote children's holistic development and lifelong learning.

Exchange and Discussion

Requirements for Implementing Montessori Education Philosophy in Preschools in Vietnam

When considering the application of the Montessori educational philosophy in preschools in Vietnam, certain requirements must be met to ensure its effectiveness and appropriateness:

Understanding of Cultural Context: Educators need a deep understanding of Vietnamese culture to adapt Montessori principles accordingly. This includes respecting cultural values and traditions in designing educational materials and activities.

Professional Training and Development: Teachers require comprehensive training in Montessori pedagogy tailored to the Vietnamese context. Continuous professional development programs should be provided to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Access to Resources: Preschools must have access to authentic Montessori materials and resources suitable for the developmental needs of Vietnamese children. Adequate funding and support are necessary to procure these resources.

Parental Involvement and Education: Educating parents about Montessori principles and involving them in their children's education is crucial for consistency between home and school environments. Parental support enhances the effectiveness of Montessori practices.

Supportive School Leadership: School administrators play a vital role in providing leadership and support for Montessori implementation. They should allocate resources, foster a culture of collaboration among staff, and promote the philosophy within the school community.

By meeting these requirements, preschools in Vietnam can effectively integrate Montessori principles into their educational programs, providing children with a holistic and culturally responsive learning experience.

Training and Professional Development for Montessori Educators in Vietnam

To enhance the competence of Montessori educators in Vietnam, it is essential to invest in comprehensive training and professional development programs:

Structured Training Programs: Develop structured training programs that cover both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in Montessori pedagogy. These programs should provide hands-on experience and mentoring opportunities.

Certification and Accreditation: Establish certification and accreditation processes to ensure that Montessori educators meet standardized qualifications and competency requirements. Accredited training institutions should adhere to international standards.

Continuous Professional Development: Offer ongoing professional development opportunities, workshops, and seminars to support the growth and development of Montessori educators throughout their careers. These programs should focus on emerging trends and best practices in early childhood education.

Collaboration with Montessori Organizations: Foster collaboration with international Montessori organizations and experts to access resources, share best practices, and stay updated on the latest research and developments in Montessori education.

Integration with Local Context: Tailor training programs to address the specific needs and challenges of Montessori educators working in the Vietnamese educational context. This includes language proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and curriculum alignment.

Research and Innovation: Encourage educators to engage in research and innovation to continuously improve Montessori practices and contribute to the advancement of early childhood education in Vietnam. Support research initiatives and provide opportunities for knowledge exchange and dissemination.

Challenges in Implementing Montessori Education Philosophy in Preschools in Vietnam

Despite its potential benefits, the implementation of Montessori education in preschools in Vietnam faces several challenges:

Cultural Adaptation: Adapting Montessori principles to align with Vietnamese cultural norms and values requires careful consideration and may encounter resistance from traditional educational stakeholders.

Resource Constraints: The limited availability of authentic Montessori materials, trained educators, and financial resources poses significant challenges to implementing Montessori education at scale in Vietnam.

Parental Awareness and Acceptance: Educating parents about Montessori philosophy and practices and gaining their acceptance may be challenging, particularly in communities with limited exposure to alternative educational approaches.

Policy and Regulatory Framework: The lack of clear policy guidelines and regulatory framework for Montessori education in Vietnam can create uncertainty and barriers to implementation, including issues related to accreditation, certification, and curriculum alignment.

Socioeconomic Disparities: Socioeconomic disparities in access to quality education and resources may exacerbate inequities in Montessori implementation, with affluent urban areas more likely to benefit than rural or disadvantaged communities.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from policymakers, educators, parents, and community stakeholders to prioritize early childhood education, invest in teacher training and resources, raise awareness and acceptance of Montessori education, and develop supportive policy frameworks conducive to its implementation (Kyriakides et al., 2009; de Jager et al., 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the application of the Montessori educational philosophy in preschools in Vietnam holds great promise but also presents significant challenges. While Montessori principles have demonstrated adaptability to diverse cultural contexts, including Vietnam, successful implementation requires careful attention to specific requirements and considerations.

Key requirements for effective implementation include a deep understanding of Vietnamese culture, comprehensive training and professional development for Montessori educators, access to authentic Montessori materials, parental involvement and education, and supportive school leadership. By meeting these requirements, preschools can integrate Montessori principles into their educational programs, providing children with a holistic and culturally responsive learning experience.

However, challenges such as cultural adaptation, resource constraints, parental awareness and acceptance, policy and regulatory framework, and socioeconomic disparities must be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of Montessori education in Vietnam. Overcoming these challenges will require collaborative efforts from policymakers, educators, parents, and community stakeholders to prioritize early childhood education, invest in teacher training and resources, raise awareness and acceptance of Montessori education, and develop supportive policy frameworks.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of Montessori education, including fostering independence, social skills, and holistic development, make it a valuable approach worth pursuing in Vietnam. With dedication, innovation, and collaboration, Montessori education can contribute to the advancement of early childhood education and the overall well-being of children in Vietnam.

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