

49 Viet Nam: Distance learning through TV broadcasting

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Type of intervention: governmental (Ministry of Education and Training)

General description

Viet Nam has a centralised education system with 27 723 schools serving over 16 000 primary and secondary students. Approximately 16.3% of students in the country are from ethnic minority groups and nearly 40% are from rural and economically less developed regions. All schools follow a unified national curriculum and academic year plan specified by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). The first COVID-19 case was recorded in Viet Nam on 23 January 2020 when students were about to begin the Lunar New Year holiday. School closures in the country began ten days later on 3 February 2020 and were prolonged for three months until early or mid-May, depending on the province and grade level.

As soon as schools closed throughout the country, MOET implemented a series of rapid responses, involving teachers and local education agencies, to ensure educational continuity, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. First, the school year plan and curriculum framework were amended in light of the shortened time frame available and according to guidelines on switching to teaching through digital platforms. The time spent on topics that require significant rote learning was reduced to allow a focus on practical topics and applying knowledge to enhance students' capabilities.

Second and more importantly, MOET began to broadcast school lessons on 1 national and 27 provincial TV channels across the country. Local education agencies were in charge of developing and producing TV lessons subject to local conditions. They crowdsourced ideas from teachers specialised in specific domains to develop educational TV programmes at the provincial level. In the 27 (out of 65) provinces where TV lessons aired, as a minimum, students in 9th and 12th grades were able to watch three 30-minute maths and Vietnamese literature lessons per week. The lessons strictly followed the simplified curriculum framework communicated by MOET. Teachers and schools were involved in assessing lessons to ensure their quality before they aired. In areas where planning and filming lessons at the provincial level was not possible, the province's TV station would tune in to a nearby channel or the national channel to broadcast lessons produced in other areas of the country.

Given the limited time and resources available and the high proportion of students from less advantaged groups who did not have the resources to access online learning platforms, MOET's online and TV learning strategy was implemented quickly, with the first lesson being broadcast after only two weeks of the school closures. In some provinces, 80% of students were able to access on line or watch educational TV lessons during the period of social distancing. Because the lessons adhered to the simplified framework curriculum, the school year remained on track to finish in July, as scheduled, and the national high school examination could take place in August, again as scheduled.

Main problems addressed

MOET's top priority has been to ensure the continuity of academic learning and prevent a widening of the achievement gap, especially given the large number of students in remote and disadvantaged socio-economic regions in Viet Nam.

Addressing the digital divide. MOET's online learning strategy encourages schools to make use of digital learning platforms to deliver lessons where access to technology is available. While this is the case in major cities, only 10-20% of students and teachers working in less advantaged areas have access to personal digital devices at home. In addition, even in big cities where online learning has become easier, it was challenging for MOET and local Departments of Education and Training (DOETs) to supervise the pace and quality of teaching compared to normal face-to-face interactions. Such monitoring is important to ensure the fairness and validity of the national graduation examinations, which were maintained and successfully held on 8 August in the conventional way (with all candidates and invigilators wearing masks and having a temperature check before entering the exam sites). Therefore, it was not possible for all education institutions throughout the country to implement online learning.

Engaging students using TV lessons. Addressing limited and unequal access to online learning was made even more difficult as a result of budget limitations. Distributing personal digital devices, such as tablets or laptops, to each student who lacked a device was not sustainable. However, over 90% of Vietnamese households own a television, and in less advantaged areas at least 85% of households do. Therefore, broadcasting lessons on TV became an effective solution to engage more students in distance learning. Prior to the pandemic, a national education channel existed, but mainly to review and prepare for exams. During school closures due to COVID-19, TV lessons had to be rethought completely to address the problem of completing the school year for all grade levels.

Addressing regional differences. Finally, another difficulty in the Vietnamese context is the necessity of adapting to regional conditions. Despite a centralised and simplified national framework curriculum, reaching students at home in Viet Nam entailed different strategies depending on the region. The solution proposed by MOET to ensure remote pedagogical continuity emphasised the need to develop and organise learning content and lessons at a local level. This involved 28 TV stations across the country and the use of crowdsourcing to engage local teachers in addressing this problem, to meet the specific needs of all students.

Mobilising and developing resources

Building on the existing infrastructure. In face of both those national and local challenges, MOET directed provincial DOETs to monitor online and educational TV programmes at a regional level. It was the DOETs' responsibility to determine whether to rely on online learning platforms (where infrastructures allowed it), TV lessons or a combination of both within each province depending on the local situation. In cities where online learning was possible, schools assessed the availability of staff and facilities to produce detailed teaching schedules and choices of subjects. Some schools successfully managed to cover more than 10 weeks of teaching for all 13 subjects, including physical education, while others focused only on mathematics and the Vietnamese language. Teaching timetables varied by school and grade level since different pupils from the same household might have to share one digital device for learning. Schools and teachers had flexibility in their choices about which technology tools to use for lesson delivery and sharing of learning materials, with options including livestreaming on social network pages, online meeting tools or web-based learning platforms.

Crowdsourcing the design of new educational resources for TV. Online learning was often impossible at the provincial level. As a result, local DOETs were also responsible for co-ordinating educational TV lessons across their given region by crowdsourcing ideas from regional teachers to develop educational TV programmes. The majority of cities and provinces aimed to broadcast mathematics, Vietnamese language and literature, and English lessons for end-of-level grades (i.e. 9th and 12th grades) and sometimes also 5th grade, although there were also some provinces where lessons for all levels from 4th through 12th grades were produced. Producing TV lessons for all subjects at all grade levels within a tight time frame was a challenge for teachers and the local DOETs. To achieve this, each school in the province was asked to take turns taking charge of at least one subject at one particular grade level. The school's subject department would have to be involved in creating and reviewing lesson plans and nominating teachers with ample professional and IT experience to receive training and deliver the lessons. Thousands of teachers across the country contributed to developing lesson plans following the simplified framework curriculum circulated by MOET. The plans were then reviewed by the school board and the DOETs to ensure that they were appropriate for TV broadcasting in terms of length, content, requirement of IT facilities and inclusion of interactive activities. If necessary, they were amended before filming could start.

Collaborating with stakeholders from across the educational system. Unlike in normal in-person teaching and learning when lesson plans are developed individually by teachers, lessons for TV broadcast were usually designed collectively by the subject department of the school in charge. This strategy of allocating workload allows multiple lessons in different subjects to be simultaneously developed and broadcast in a timely manner. The whole education system including local agencies, school leaders and teachers have shown determination in their attitudes and sense of responsibility, going beyond the classroom and school campus. Thousands of teachers have worked hard to develop learning materials, adapt to new teaching methods and plan lessons, as well as provide additional academic and emotional support for students with difficulties.

Partnering with provincial TV stations. In total, 28 national and provincial TV stations collaborated with the local DOETs and took charge of filming, editing and broadcasting the crowdsourced lessons. It took only two weeks until the first batch of TV lessons aired in mid-April. There were detailed schedules updated weekly for students to follow by grade and subject. In the case of some regions, such as Hanoi, where almost all subject lessons from 4th through 12th grades were broadcast, airing time could be up to 12 hours, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. every day from Monday through Saturday. MOET also reviewed and selected suitable lessons to broadcast on national TV channels. The TV lessons were free of charge and open to all students who had access to a TV, and were made available on different digital platforms, including websites and free digital apps.

Fostering effective use and learning

To optimise the effectiveness of the educational broadcasts, MOET issued specific guidelines on organising teaching and learning for TV lessons, emphasising co-ordination between schools and parents, particularly class attendance/viewing lessons, testing and assessment. Communication between the schools and parents has been strengthened by telephone, online teacher-parent meetings, and question and answer sessions, as well as home visits for regular updates of the conditions and learning habits of students.

In big cities, these educational TV lessons were regarded as lectures, disseminating knowledge, while online lessons with teachers helped students to review the topic and allowed for more discussion and/or explanation. For less affluent areas, teachers made an extra effort to visit students at home with printed learning materials to ensure the continuity of schooling and academic supervision for students. Constant collaboration between schools and parents was highly encouraged to monitor children's learning habits with a view to preventing students from dropping out of school to be married or forced into child labour.

Implementation challenges

The major challenges facing the project's implementation were limited budget and IT skills, co-ordinating a wide range of stakeholders, supporting teachers' and students' motivation, and validating distance-learning results.

Limited resources. There has always been limited facilities and equipment for teaching and learning, including television, computer and Internet connection, particularly in rural and remote areas in Viet Nam. Many low-income households are still without any means of connecting to online platforms and the available budget did not allow personal digital devices to be distributed to enable disadvantaged students to access learning resources as was undertaken by some other countries. Teachers and students were overall unfamiliar with different types of distance learning. Very few teachers had prior experience and/or skills in preparing and delivering lessons on TV, where they do not interact with students. It is also difficult to engage disadvantaged students (many of whom are low performing) in independent learning through TV programmes or personal PC/tablets.

Co-ordinating stakeholders across the education system. School leaders and the local DOETs have made a lot of efforts to co-ordinate with teachers and TV stations, and to monitor and review the content and production of thousands of broadcast lessons. Regarding the digital platform, many private education companies have provided free access to their lessons and learning materials, and collaborated with national TV stations to produce lessons on TV channels. This has worked thanks to Viet Nam's centralised education system, where local educators and teachers are required to follow MOET's guidelines.

Supporting teachers to maintain motivation. Even though the government has been determined to maintain education continuity for students across the country by creating a separate financial plan, distance learning has been made possible mainly by drawing on changes in perceptions, attitudes and commitment levels of all parties involved. Teachers received professional training and support for IT and pedagogical skills, emotional support and acknowledgement from school leaders and local educational authorities for their sense of responsibility and commitment to address challenges.

Developing criteria to assess distance learning. To motivate teachers and students further, MOET has begun the validation process of distance-learning assessment results. The content and duration of online and TV learning count towards the 2019-20 academic year, so teachers can proceed as scheduled when schools reopen. All the course examinations and projects delivered during school closures were taken into account, and MOET is currently working on criteria for accrediting the completion of distance-learning courses, which helps to promote students' and teachers' level of commitment.

Monitoring success

Over 2 000 lessons have been developed, broadcast and watched by 87% of students in major cities and 40% of those in remote areas. On average, more than 70% of students throughout the country were able to access learning activities during the three months of school closures. Thanks to the combination of knowledge transmission on TV, online applications and discussions with teachers, many schools have managed to complete all teaching, learning and assessment activities within the school year, as scheduled. Teachers have demonstrated the utmost professionalism and determination in learning new skills and teaching methods. All teachers and school leaders were willing to prioritise children and work for their benefit.

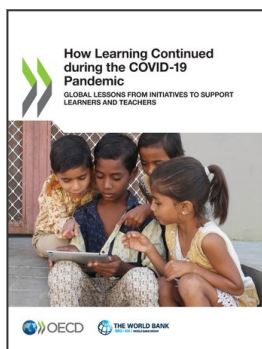
Adaptability to new contexts

The experiences of Viet Nam may also be applicable to other developing countries with centralised education systems where schools follow a set national curriculum framework. The ability to mobilise resources and the commitment of thousands of teachers, school leaders and local educators make these experiences particularly notable in overcoming financial and social restraints.

Lessons continued to be produced and broadcast weeks after schools reopened for those who were not able to come back to school as scheduled. The editing and compilation of these lessons are being actively monitored to build a learning resource that can be shared in the long term, with plans to make these digitally stored resources available to students from different backgrounds in the country. MOET has realised that while the pandemic crisis resulted in a series of rapid coping responses, it has created an opportunity for digitalisation in education. Applying technology to innovative education models has always been challenging in developing contexts, due to the perceptions, beliefs and attitudes of teachers and educators. Therefore, this can be an opportune moment to promote digital transformation, sharing and optimising of resources to tackle the goal of sustainable development in education within the region.

Box 49.1. Key points to keep in mind for a successful adaptation

1. Disseminate information thoroughly to encourage changes in attitudes and a sense of responsibility.
2. Crowdfund the creation of teaching resources and involve every individual in the implementation process to maximise human capital.
3. Constantly provide positive support and show understanding to teachers, students and all stakeholders to encourage motivation, resilience and flexibility.
4. Instigate concrete measures to reach disadvantaged students and students in rural areas, through the use of TV, individual home visits (if regulations allow this) and other measures.
5. Consider instigating a collaborative effort with educational stakeholders to develop criteria for success in distance education.
6. Optimise opportunities for sustainable digital transformation in education by developing open online source learning materials and continuous professional development sessions for teachers and education leaders.



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