

# Enhancing Creativity in Vietnam for Global Economic Success

What's new: The Vietnamese labor market and global economy are changing rapidly.

- Vietnam has become integrated into the global market economy (Glewwe & Dang, 2017)
- The International Monetary Fund predicts that rapidly developing technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) will affect almost 40% of jobs around the world, with some replaced and others complemented (Georgieva, 2024).
- Many graduates will change jobs many times, including in different industries and roles (Tran et al., 2016).



**About 40% of jobs worldwide will be affected by AI**

Problem: But Vietnamese schooling has not changed enough to prepare students for the modern labor market.

- Many education and political leaders in Vietnam view schools as not keeping pace with the changing needs of the workforce (Glewwe & Dang, 2017).
- Results from a questionnaire survey among 25 employers of Vietnam National University Hanoi law school graduates indicate that the graduates lacked the necessary skills for the changing needs of the labor market (Lan, 2018).
- Passive and rote learning is common in Vietnamese schools (Glewwe & Dang, 2017).

## Systemic causes of passive learning

- Social norms of conformity and cultural norms (shaped by Confucian ideology) of being spoon-fed knowledge by an authoritative teacher hamper students' creative and critical thinking (Tuyet, 2013).
- Competitive national standardized examinations incentivize rote memorization over creative thinking (Tuyet, 2013).
- Strong, centralized government control over universities inhibits innovation in pedagogy (Tran et al., 2016).

## What's missing: Creativity is one of the essential skills for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- A 2020 study by Lan et al. explored and measured the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills of over a thousand Vietnamese secondary students. Creativity skills were measured as students' ability to address problems from various dimensions and approaches, express themselves creatively through designing products and techniques, and critically assess and build on other's ideas (Lan, 2020).
- Creativity cultivates flexibility, adaptability, and resilience, which are critical for confronting the challenges of the global knowledge economy (Tran et al., 2016).
- Creative thinkers drive innovation, entrepreneurship, and new ideas for solving social and economic problems ("21<sup>st</sup> century," 2018).

## Policy recommendation: Promote creativity (in problem-solving) in schools.

- According to a 2023 qualitative analysis of various sources including Vietnamese government policies, reports from international organizations, and curriculum documents, research and expert opinions support the benefits of a liberal education that fosters creativity and adaptability and enables Vietnamese students to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Huong, 2023).
- Like other skills, anyone can develop their creativity and innovation skills with practice, including by teachers and learning environments that encourage questioning, flexibility, and learning from mistakes (Mukombe & Gaotlhobogwe, 2021).
- A quasi-experimental, mixed methods study in Vietnam found that enriching mathematics instruction with creativity—including by simulating realistic and practical contexts, bringing in students' experiences, and providing opportunities for self-driven and collaborative exploration—fostered creative skills in mathematical problem-solving (Dang, Bui, & Nhan, 2023).

## **Definition of key terms**

**21<sup>st</sup> century skills:** Skills that enable students to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (a rapidly changing global knowledge economy). These skills include creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. These skills are often transferable (which enable people to adapt to different work and life contexts).

**Creativity:** the ability to generate, articulate or apply innovative ideas, techniques, and perspectives. One way to measure creativity is to rate how many novel and useful solutions students could generate for solving a problem. Creativity promotes flexibility, enabling students to change and adapt to new situations. Creativity falls under one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

**Learner-centered pedagogy:** Student-focused learning involving active student participation and creative, play-based exploration.

## **Policy outcome**

Promote creativity in schools

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Improve innovative brainstorming

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Improve flexibility to labor market changes

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Thrive in the global economy

### Policy implementation (of creative instruction)

- Creative instruction is intuitive, fun, and effective. The cost of promoting creativity in schools is low (main costs are curriculum development and teacher training).
- The Vietnamese government eagerly seeks to reform the education system to equip students with the skills needed for the modern economy (Dang et al., 2022). But to make significant change and progress in higher education, it is necessary to address systemic barriers and discuss what kinds of creativity face resistance in society.
- Once creativity instruction is well established and accepted in schools, education leaders may become more open to also promoting other policies, namely learner-centered pedagogy and arts education, that can expand students' creativity in greater dimensions and enable people to thrive in their careers and life.

### **Policy recommended for later: Promote learner-centered pedagogy**

- Learner-centered pedagogy will shift teachers' roles from didactic instructors to complex and sensitive facilitators who guide the personal development of each student (Tran et al., 2016). Learner-centered pedagogy can cultivate creativity by empowering students to be active, creative agents of their learning and ever-evolving global economy.
- Impact evaluation of Vietnam's Escuela Nueva program (supported by the World Bank) found that enhancing primary school quality via developing 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and learner-centered pedagogy in primary school improved creativity (Dang et al., 2022).
- However, compared to promoting creative instruction, learner-centered pedagogy would likely face greater teacher resistance because it would require additional time from teachers—who are already underpaid and overstretched—to personalize instruction to each student, especially with large class sizes.

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