



THOUGHT OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN ON EDUCATION AND LESSONS LEARNED TOWARDS EDUCATION IN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Benjamin Franklin, who is widely known as the inventor of the lightning rod and one of the founding fathers of the United States, had progressive thoughts on education. *“Possibly no other practical man has given in his writings a fuller and clearer statement of what education should do for one than has Franklin”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.3). However, his educational thought has not been clarified yet (see: Cook, 2010). Accordingly, this paper analyzes some of his prominent educational viewpoints and draws from them some lessons learned towards the current Vietnamese education.

Keywords: Benjamin Franklin, educational thought, education in Vietnam

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, *“education is the top priority, the cause of the Communist Party, the Government and the people”* (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013, B, I, 1). It has gained many considerable achievements; however, there have been certain weaknesses therein. Therefore, the Communist Party and Government of Vietnam have advocated fundamental and comprehensive innovation in the country’s education (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013, B). This has

boosted the demand for educational research, especially in the field of educational philosophy.

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) is an American philosopher (Abbott, 1879; Robins, 1898; Jacobs, 1972; Pangle, 2007) and educator (see: Cook, 2010). He was referred to as *“the first philosopher of America”* by David Hume, as well as described as *“the Prometheus of modern times”* by Immanuel Kant (Goodwin, 2016). He made substantial contributions towards the educational philosophy and was mentioned in educational encyclopedias such as *“Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent”* (2010), *“Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia”* (2013), *“Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy”* (2014). Therefore, his educational thought has held much attraction for scholars. Parton (1870) and Chaplin (1876) studied Franklin’s educational views through the stories of his life; Abbott (1879), Robins (1898), Jacobs (1972), and Pangle (2007) researched into his educational ideas through the events in his career. Cloyd (1902) studied Franklin’s system of education; R. Tait McKenzie M.D., LL.D., R.C.A. (1936) wrote about Franklin’s ideas of physical education; Mickey (1989) focused on studying *“a Marxist analysis of the contribution of Benjamin Franklin and the Junto to adult education”*, among others. However, in general, Franklin’s educational thought has still not been interpreted yet (see: Cook, 2010), and it seems to be a *“wild land”* that needs to be explored more.

From the above-mentioned and for the purpose of making a contribution towards the development of Vietnamese education, this study analyzes some of Franklin’s prominent educational views and draws from them some lessons learned towards the current Vietnamese education.

2. Research methodology

This study is based on the worldview and methodology of Marxist philosophy to analyze Franklin’s thought on education because the Vietnamese education is based on Marxism-Leninism (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019, Article 3.1) and Franklin is admired as a *“part of the intellectual tradition of thinkers who made a contribution to the development of Marxism”* (Aiken, 1966, p.378). Accordingly, based on the educational guidelines and policies of the Vietnamese government, the paper draws some lessons learned towards the current education of Vietnam. Moreover, the study uses some specific research methods, such as analysis and synthesis, inductive and deductive reasoning, logic and history, generalization, abstraction, comparison, and literary methods, to research and present the related issues.

3. Results and Discussions

It is found that there are different views in Benjamin Franklin’s thought on education, such as views of morality, views of teaching method, views of ideal teacher (Cloyd, 1902,

p.viii), and so on. This study focuses on clarifying his two prominent “umbrella” viewpoints, namely, views of educational forms and views of educational domains.

3.1 Benjamin Franklin’s views on educational forms

Franklin encouraged individuals in the pursuit of two basic educational forms, which are school-education and self-education, as follows:

3.1.1 School-education form

Benjamin Franklin, “one of the founding fathers of America” (Parra, 2010, p.4), had some progressive views on educational administration. Specifically, he supported the idea of autonomy in school administration – “the state should grant charters to educational institutions that they might be conducted ...” (Cloyd, 1902, p.27; see: Franklin & Sparks, 1847). Autonomy relates to freedom. “The freedom he loved and wanted to advance was not the Kantian freedom of a radically undetermined human will, regarded with solemn respect by other free wills who leave each other the greatest possible autonomy” (Pangle, 2007, p.124). Accordingly, Franklin’s “autonomy” is “autonomy connected”, not “autonomy separated”. He believed that the autonomy in school administration should exist in connection with state management. According to him, schools should be under the state control to guard against their mismanagement and be aided by the government (see: Franklin & Sparks, 1847).

Besides, he advocated a flexible curriculum. His first suggestion for the curriculum of his Academy left Latin and Greek out because he supposed that an English school would be adapted more effectively to the learners who would become merchants and tradesmen. However, he then changed his mind and maintained two parallel curricula, the English and the Latin and Greek, because he had realized that the potential sponsors of the Academy, which were wealthy Philadelphians, much preferred the instruction in Latin and Greek. This is Franklin’s “pragmatism” – “a willingness not to insist on some abstract principle in transactions with other people, a willingness to make concessions” (Morgan, 2005, p.299).

Moreover, he headed towards an education for the general educational purposes of the country (see: Franklin, 2012). This idea came from his genuine interest of his country as well as the “general welfare” of the society – he said: “In quality of a citizen you are obliged to take care of the commonwealth” (Franklin & Sparks, 1847, p.63). Indeed, he developed a plan for establishing the Philadelphia Academy, made proposals relating to the education of youth in Pennsylvania, made a sketch of an English school, and so on.

Philosophically meditating on the aforementioned viewpoints, the paper discovers that they follow some fundamental principles of Marxism. Specifically, it is concerning the unity between objective dialectic (the preference of potential sponsors of the Academy for the instruction in Latin and Greek) and subjective one (the Academy’s constitution offered the Greek and Latin school). Besides, as Lenin said: “the universal exists only in the individual and through the individual” (Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976, p.359), Franklin’s “individuals”, such as “the educational goal of the Philadelphia

Academy or Pennsylvania youth education” and “the autonomy in school administration”, were put in the connection to “the universal”, namely “the general educational purposes of the country” and “the state management”.

3.1.2 Self-education form

Franklin believed that individuals by their own efforts could reach perfection in almost any field (see: Franklin, 2012). He was *“what is generally called a self-educated man. And self-education with him was a definite, conscious means of realizing in himself an Ideal, which Ideal was a life of service, and broad enough to comprehend the whole of life”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.3). According to him, self-education is not the best, but it is the best possible substitute for an educating by an educator – *“a substitute that it was possible for every individual to avail himself of”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.26). Considering the concept *“self-education”* from the perspectives of Franklin, it can be understood in two ways which is self-education in connection with people and self-education in connection with public library.

3.1.3 Self-education in connection with people (self-education in a co-operative way)

According to Franklin, self-education should be undertaken not only on one’s own but also in a cooperative way. This idea can be seen in the famous Junto. It was a literary and debating club (also known as *“Leathern Apron” Club*)ⁱ for mutual improvement, formed in 1727 by Franklin and his friends in Philadelphia – he said: *“I had form’d most of my ingenious acquaintance into a club of mutual improvement, which we called the JUNTO”* (Franklin, 2012, p.51). The name *“Junto”* is the alternative formation of the Latin *“junta”*, meaning *“to join together”* (see: Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1968, p.982; Online Etymology Dictionary, 2024). Accordingly, Junto was a place where self-education was undertaken in connection with its members. The Junto was established with the purpose of applying his principles of self-education in a cooperative way; therein, *“the importance of mutual aid was strongly emphasized in the rules governing the club”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.23). Mumford (2002) considered Franklin’s formation of the Junto as social innovation; therein, the discussions provided opportunities for self-education.

Some of Franklin’s views on self-education in connection with people can be found in his ideas of the club Junto, as follows. Firstly, it is concerning the principle of equality. The members of Junto came from diverse areas of interest, not only a certain kind of people (see Mumford, 2002). There, they had been offered equal opportunities for discussion of issues. Besides, researching into the way of operating Junto, it can be seen that the knowledge sharing of a self-learner happens according to the mechanism: *“his altruism led him to give to others whatever he had found useful to himself, and his utilitarianism led him to seek from others what could be made of use to himself”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.23). Additionally, it could be said that he headed towards building a learning society for his advocacy of multiplying the model Junto – he *“made in writing a proposal, that every member separately should endeavor to form a subordinate club, with the same rules respecting queries,*

ⁱ The members of the club discussed the issues of morals, politics, natural philosophy, and so on (Franklin, 2012).

etc." (Franklin, 2012, p.84). Moreover, self-education in connection with people is not only for self-improvement but also for social improvement. Junto, a club for "*mutual improvement*", is one of his projects for social improvement (see: Wood, 2024). The discussions in Junto "*emerged inspiration for many Philadelphia institutions, including the American Philosophical Society, the Library Company of Philadelphia, a fire company, and the University of Pennsylvania*"; *their intellectual collaboration ensured "the success of each project beyond the life of the club itself"* (Palmieri, 2015). The club then developed into the American Philosophical Society, which became "*a far-reaching and broadening influence upon present thought and action*" (Cloyd, 1902, p.24).

Philosophically meditating on Franklin's views stated above, it can be seen that they are close to the views of Marxism. Specifically, the equality in the choice of members of Junto is similar to the social equality mentioned in Marxism. Besides, the fact that "*altruism and utilitarianism can coexist in a self-learner*" as mentioned above follows the law of the unity and conflict of opposites, as stated by Marxism. Additionally, as Lenin said: "*the individual exists only in the connection that leads to the universal*" (Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976, p.359), Franklin also put "*the individual*", such as self-education of members in Junto, in relation to "*the universal*", namely learning society. And as Lenin said: "*the universal exists only in the individual and through the individual*" (Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976, p.359), Franklin also improved the contemporary colonial society – social improvement (the universal) – through establishing the Junto, a club for mutual improvement – self-improvement (the individual).

3.1.4 Self-education in connection with public library (self-education in a public library usage way)

Franklin had a real enthusiasm for reading books. In his autobiography, he said: "*From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books*" (Franklin, 2012, p.13); "*Often I sat up in my room reading the greatest part of the night*" (Franklin, 2012, p.14); and "*Reading was the only amusement I allow'd myself*" (Franklin, 2012, p.66). He strongly believed in the effectiveness of reading books – he said: "*This library ... I set apart an hour or two each day, and thus repair'd in some degree the loss of the learned education my father once intended for me*" (Franklin, 2012, p.66). Therefore, he always educated himself through reading books (see: Franklin, 2012).

With the love for books, Franklin and his friends in the Junto built up a common library for Philadelphia (Franklin, 2012). He said: "*This library afforded me the means of improvement by constant study*" (Franklin, 2012, p.66). He considered the library an important means of education to aid individuals in their self-education (Cloyd, 1902). He is not original in advocating the use of the library, but nevertheless, "*he does deserve the credit of understanding the tremendous power of the library as an educational factor*" (Cloyd, 1902, p.25). Franklin advocated so strongly "*the universal use of a library*" (Cloyd, 1902, p.30) – he said: "*clubbing our books to a common library, we should, while we lik'd to keep them together, have each of us the advantage of using the books of all the other members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each owned the whole*" (Franklin, 2012, p.59). With this idea, he

put the library within the reach of the masses (see: Cloyd, 1902), thence raising the self-education of citizens in society from the individual level up to the community level, heading to a learning society. The effectiveness of self-education in connection with library was proved in reality – he said: *“our people, having no public amusements to divert their attention from study, became better acquainted with books, and in a few years were observ’d by strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than people of the same rank generally are in other countries”* (Franklin, 2012, p.66).

The above-mentioned analyses indicate that self-education has a strong and direct relationship with the library. In fact, the library (a specific form of matter) is an important determining factor of the success in self-education (a specific form of consciousness) of individuals. This means that *“matter determines consciousness”* – this is one of the crucial views of Marxism (see: Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 14, 1977). Moreover, considering Franklin’s view on public libraries from the perspective of Marxism, it is interesting to discover that it follows the fundamental principle stated in the work *“Philosophical Notebooks”* of Lenin as follows: *“the universal exists only in the individual and through the individual”* (Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976, p.359). Franklin put *“the individual”* (books of each member in the Junto) in the connection to *“the universal”* (books of all the other members in the Junto), thence indicating another *“individual”* (self-education at individual level) in the relation to other *“universal”* (self-education at community level and a learning society).

3.2 Benjamin Franklin’s views on educational domains

Franklin mentioned different domains of education; of those, two prominent ones that the paper discusses are moral education and physical education as follows:

3.2.1 Moral education

“From early youth till his death, Franklin kept himself under the most rigid discipline and training” (Cloyd, 1902, p.4); he said: *“I conceiv’d the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection. I wish’d to live without committing any fault at any time”* (Franklin, 2012, p.68). Accordingly, his views on moral education seem a perfect selection for research. Reading his works, it can be found some useful content and methods for moral education can be found as follows:

3.2.2 Of moral education content

Moral education contents, according to Franklin, need to be clear and concrete – he said: *I purposed writing a little comment on each virtue, in which I would have shown the advantages of possessing it, and the mischiefs attending its opposite vice ... because it would have shown the means and manner of obtaining virtue, which would have distinguished it from the mere exhortation to be good.* (Franklin, 2012, p.75)

He also suggested teaching moral lessons through teaching history ones in class – he said: *“In remarking on the history, the master will have fine opportunities of instilling instruction of various kinds, and improving the morals”* (Franklin, 1809, p.215). However, he

attached great importance to moral self-education. He proposed a list of virtues (Table 1) for moral self-education as follows:

Table 1: Franklin’s list of virtues

	Names of virtues	Precepts
1	Temperance	Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2	Silence	Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3	Order	Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4	Resolution	Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5	Frugality	Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; i.e., waste nothing.
6	Industry	Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7	Sincerity	Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and, if you speak, speak accordingly.
8	Justice	Wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9	Moderation	Avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10	Cleanliness	Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation.
11	Tranquility	Be not disturbed at trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable.
12	Chastity	Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another’s peace or reputation.
13	Humility	Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

Source: Franklin, 2012, p. 69-70.

According to Franklin, to acquire the habit of the above-mentioned virtues, some self-denial is necessary. He said: *“without self-denial there is no virtue, and that the greater the self-denial the greater the virtue”* (Franklin & Sparks, 1847, p.63). However, according to him, self-denial is not the essence of virtue (Franklin & Sparks, 1847). It is neither good nor bad, but as it is applied (Franklin & Sparks, 1847), and it is worthy to be commended when being applied in a good sense or in an act of service (Cloyd, 1902).

3.2.3 Of the moral education method

Reading Franklin’s autobiography, the paper discovers three prominent methods proposed for moral education as follows. Firstly, he developed a method of self-discipline to become virtuous – the *“method of attaining moral perfection”*. He applied this method elaborately and comprehensively, even *“regarding the minutest acts”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.7). According to him, one becomes virtuous by practising virtues until they become habits – he said: *“Virtue was not secure till its practice became a habitude”* (Franklin, 2012, p.80). He criticized dogmatic moral education, but strongly supported the practice of virtues (see: Franklin, 2012). He insisted that *“The contrary habits must be broken, and good ones acquired and established”* (Franklin, 2012, p.69). Secondly, according to him, inheritance is a good moral education method. Therefore, it should not be hasty, but persevere in acquiring the habit of virtues. He said: *“Like him who, having a garden to weed, does not attempt to eradicate all the bad herbs at once, which would exceed his reach and his strength, but works on one of the beds at a time and, having accomplish’d the first, proceeds to a second”* (Franklin, 2012, p.71). In

the similar way, he said: *“to acquire the habitude of ... virtues, I judg’d it would be well not to distract my attention by attempting the whole at once, but to fix it on one of them at a time”* (Franklin, 2012, p.70). And he explained: *“the previous acquisition of some might facilitate the acquisition of certain others”* (Franklin, 2012, p.70). Finally, moral education by example is another method that he believed in its effectiveness – he advised making virtues in countenance by examples of truly great men (Franklin, 2012).

It can be seen that the spirit of Marxism is reflected in the above-mentioned views of Franklin on moral educational contents and methods. Firstly, as Lenin said: *“from living perception to abstract thought, and from this to practice, – such is the dialectical path of the cognition of truth, of the cognition of objective reality”* (Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976, p.171), Franklin’s viewpoints of moral education are highly practical – he believed that morality was only attained by practising virtues. Besides, Franklin’s view on the concrete in moral teaching is close to the perspective of Lenin in the work *“Philosophical Notebooks”* as follows: *“It has sometimes been said that scientific truth is nothing but an abstraction ... But, on the other hand, it aims at discovering the objective, the concrete”* (Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976, p.459). In addition, Franklin indicated the relation between moral lessons and historical ones. This view is very close to Marxism’s dialectics about organic relations between entities. Moreover, as Lenin said: *“the universal exists only in the individual and through the individual”* (Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976, p.359), Franklin recognized *“the universal”*, namely social morality, in *“the individual”*, such as truly great men who became good examples for their followers.

3.2.4 Physical education

Physical education in the United States during the late 1600s and into the early 1700s had not yet developed (Shimon, 2020). Benjamin Franklin was an illustrious pioneer in this educational domain (R. Tait McKenzie M.D., LL.D., & R.C.A., 1936). He had significant contributions; therein, *“his most important contribution ... was his recommendation that physical education should be an integral part of a college education”* (R. Tait McKenzie M.D., LL.D., & R.C.A., 1936, p.125). He indicated the physical exercise as a prominent part of learners’ duties for the double purpose of preventing diseases as well as giving strength and vigour to body and mind (Cloyd, 1902). He believed that people need to be healthy to be wise and wealthy (see: Franklin, 1855).

In the field of swimming, Franklin deserves a great honour. He was a good swimmer when he was very young – he said: *“living near the water, I was much in and about it, learnt early to swim well”* (Franklin, 2012, p.11). *“He was an expert swimmer, and taught many of his friends the art”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.41) – he told: *“I taught him and a friend of his to swim at twice going into the river, and they soon became good swimmers”* (Franklin, 2012, p.42). He discovered a new method for an effective swim – he humbly narrated:

“As the ordinary method of swimming is reduced to the act of rowing with the arms and legs, and is consequently a laborious and fatiguing operation when the space of water to be crossed is considerable, there is a method in which a swimmer may pass to great distances

with much facility by means of a sail. This discovery I fortunately made by accident.”
(Franklin & Sparks, 1882, p.292)

He is also known as an influential inventor in the field of swimming – “*swim fins ... were one of Franklin’s first inventions. These devices were meant to help him swim faster ... His swim fins were not entirely effective, though ... his invention led to modern-day swimming fins*” (Gunderson, 2019, p.7-8). It can be said that Franklin had a lifelong delight in swimming and a practical ability to make swimming popular in the Western (Pomeroy, 2021).

Meditating on the above-mentioned analyses, it can be clearly seen that the spirit of Marxism is therein. For instance, according to Franklin, a healthy constitution (a specific form of “*matter*”) is an important condition ensuring good study. It means that “*matter*” determines “*consciousness*” – this is an important aspect of Marxism.

3.3 Lessons learned towards education in Vietnam

From the above-mentioned analyses and based on the educational guidelines and policies of the Vietnamese government, the paper draws some important lessons learned towards the current Vietnamese education, namely lessons learned about the autonomy in educational administration, lessons learned about building a learning society, lessons learned about moral education, and lessons learned about physical education.

3.3.1 Lessons learned about the autonomy in educational administration

Nowadays, autonomy has become a widely used concept in education policy and practice (Wermke & Salokangas, 2015). In Vietnam, “*mechanisms for autonomous administration ... in education and training have been institutionalized, and yielded initial results*” (The Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.20-21). However, they still face some limitations and disadvantages, such as a lack of consensus in awareness of school autonomy, being still inadequate in personnel autonomy, as well as accountability (Pham Do Nhat Tien, 2017). Therefore, the Vietnamese government has proposed enhancing “*autonomy and responsibility of educational institutions*” (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013), granting “*public vocational education institutions greater autonomy*” (The Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2021), and so forth. The above-mentioned indicated the urgent need for discussions of the relevant issues.

Franklin indicated the autonomy in school administration, by which he managed the curriculum of his Academy flexibly. According to him, school autonomy should exist in connection with the government’s management, for the purpose of state aid and guarding against the school’s mismanagement. And it needs to head towards the general educational purposes of the country. These ideas can be effectively applied in Vietnam due to not only the current state of Vietnamese education and the state’s genuine interest in educational autonomy as stated above, but also some facts as follows. Firstly, the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam regulates that the State of Vietnam shall

implement the principle of democratic centralism (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2013, Article 8.1). This means that autonomy in school administration must be connected to state management; simultaneously, the educational goals of schools have to align towards the educational purposes of the country. However, according to the Documents of the 13th Party Congress, the Communist Party and the Government of Vietnam advocate:

“To push ahead decentralization and devolution of power in association with close scrutinization, supervision and control over their execution, and combat degeneration; and to enforce mechanisms for local levels to promote their proactiveness and creativeness in association with their upheld accountability, while ensuring unified leadership, guidance and governance by the central level.” (The Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.189)

Those expressed that Vietnam has offered open-mechanisms for autonomy in school administration. Secondly, the connection requires the responsibilities of both the school and the state. In Vietnam, this is regulated clearly in the Documents of the 13th Party Congress as follows:

“To push forward efforts to synchronously reform and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of State governance, professional management and occupational administration in education and training, and step by step effectively implement a mechanism of autonomy linked with accountability of education and training units. (The Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.116); To innovate mechanisms for decentralization, devolution and delegation of power in association with delineated and enhanced responsibilities of both the central and local levels.” (The Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.103)

Finally, the concept “school autonomy” has been quite new in Vietnam, primarily applied in the field of higher education – university autonomy “has been implemented in Vietnamese higher education for over two decades” (Hoang Thi Thu Trang, Tran Thi Huong, & Vu Thuy Duong, 2023, p.996). It has been continuing to be applied to the other educational levels. Accordingly, the strong connection between schools and the state seems a good recommendation for the autonomy in school administration in Vietnam today, for the necessary support from the state, such as financial aid.

3.3.2 Lessons learned about building a learning society

The State of Vietnam is “to design and effectively carry out strategies on international cooperation and integration in education and training” (The Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.117). “Globalization has resulted in the development of learning societies” (Jarvis, 2010, p.343). Therefore, Vietnam has been promoting “the development of a learning society” (The Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.114); the Resolution on “Fundamental and Comprehensive Innovation in Education ...” also asserts: “complete the national education system towards openness ... and building a learning society” (The Central Steering Committee

of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013, B, III, 4). The above-analyzed indicates the need to build a learning society for the educational development of the country.

Franklin advocated a system of community learning centers for self-learners of all classes in society. This can be seen in his ideas of a club for mutual improvement – the club *Junto* – and a public library – the library company of Philadelphia. *“The Junto itself has developed into the American Philosophical Society ... a far-reaching and broadening influence upon present thought and action”* (Cloyd, 1902, p.24). And it was thanks to his idea of *“the universal use of a library”* expressed through his public library that the library was put within the reach of the masses (see: Cloyd, 1902). In his autobiography, he was so proud of a series of public libraries following the model of his library company of Philadelphia – he said:

“The libraries were augmented by donations; reading became fashionable; and our people, having no public amusements to divert their attention from study, became better acquainted with books, and in a few years were observ’d by strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than people of the same rank generally are in other countries.” (Franklin, 2012, p.66).

The above analyses may imply some useful lessons learned about building a learning society as follows. Firstly, a learning society can be formed by the way of lifting self-learning from the individual level up to the community level, as well as from spontaneity up to self-awareness. It is feasible to apply this in Vietnam due to the tradition of studiousness and solidarity of the Vietnamese. Secondly, building a learning society needs a strong connection between community learning centers, such as academic clubs, and the public library. A combination of these two kinds of organizations should become a typical model multiplied up in the extent of the whole society to contribute to forming a learning society. Finally, it is necessary to develop a reading culture among citizens. The higher the reading culture is, the more likely a learning society is to be formed. And it is important to pay attention to the impact of information and communication technology on traditional reading culture. According to Dai Luong (2021), *“today, while technology is steadily controlling personal lives, the habit of reading paper books is rapidly decreasing. Instead, they spend more hours on electronic means”* (p.23). Of this issue, the Law on Information Technology (2017) regulates: *“To create favorable conditions for organizations and individuals engaged in information technology application and development activities to meet socio-economic development”* (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2017, Article 5.1).

3.3.3 Lessons learned about moral education

Moral education is always considered the crucial part of Vietnamese education. The Resolution on *“Fundamental and Comprehensive Innovation in Education ...”* attaches special importance to education about *ethics and professional ethics* (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013). Besides, the Education Law of

Vietnam regulates that the contents of education must be attached to *ethical consciousness* (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019, Article 7.1).

Franklin indicated some important properties of moral education that should be promoted, such as practicality, interdisciplinarity, self-discipline, and inheritance. Firstly, Franklin attached much importance to the practicality in moral education. He criticized dogmatic moral education and insisted: *"Virtue was not secure till its practice became a habitude"* (Franklin, 2012, p.80). He also supported concrete contents in moral education – he said: *"I purposed writing a little comment on each virtue, in which I would have shown the advantages of possessing it, and the mischiefs attending its opposite vice ... because it would have shown the means and manner of obtaining virtue, which would have distinguished it from the mere exhortation to be good"* (Franklin, 2012, p.75). Accordingly, the moral education lessons in schools should not be abstract and merely theoretical, but concrete and combined with practical situations. It is practicable to apply this view in Vietnam. The Education Law of Vietnam regulates: *"Educational programmes must ensure the scientific and practical characteristics"* (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019, Article 8.2) and the viewpoint of the Communist Party and the Government on the current orientation for fundamental and comprehensive innovation in Vietnamese education is *"associate learning with practicing"* (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013, B, I, 3). In addition, schools should develop a set of moral standards to make moral teaching more effective. With regard to interdisciplinarity, he indicated the relation between moral lessons and historical ones in class – he said: *"In remarking on the history, the master will have fine opportunities of instilling instruction of various kinds, and improving the morals"* (Franklin, 1809, p.215). This idea is feasible to apply in Vietnam since promoting interdisciplinary practice or application is the new direction for some history training units in Vietnam nowadays (see: Giaoduc.net.vn, 2024). Regarding self-discipline, he applied his method of moral self-discipline elaborately and comprehensively *"regarding the minutest acts"* (Cloyd, 1902, p.7). It cannot be denied that this method goes on throughout one's life. It is related to the issue of lifelong learning. Furthermore, it is reasonable in the current educational context of Vietnam – Vietnam asserts: *"complete the national education system towards openness, lifelong learning"* (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013, B, III, 4). Finally, Franklin indicated the inheritance in moral education when suggesting learners follow the moral examples of truly great men (see: Franklin, 2012). In Vietnam, learners have been encouraged to inherit and develop the good traditions of the country as well as to follow the moral examples of national heroes such as Nguyen Trai, Ho Chi Minh, and so on. This should be maintained and promoted.

3.3.4 Lessons learned about physical education

According to the report of UNESCO on *"World-wide Survey of School Physical Education"* (2013), *"There are general global and regional concerns about physical education facilities (indoors and outdoors) as well as associated amenities (such as changing rooms and showers), equipment provision and inadequacies in facility maintenance"* (p.9). Accordingly, The World Health

Organization (WHO) (2022) suggested a policy of “*promoting physical activity through schools*” to “*support school policy-makers, planners and school principals to develop effective whole-of-school approaches to promoting physical activity*” (p.3).

In Vietnam, physical education has always been given attention. Indeed, the Education Law of Vietnam (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019) regulates: “*contents of education must be suitable with the physical development of learners*” (Article 7.1); and “*teachers must maintain good health as required by the profession*” (Article 67.4). However, besides advantages, schools still face certain limitations and disadvantages, such as limited investment, insufficient and obsolete facilities, weak staff, and so on (see: Hieu Nguyen, 2020). Therefore, promoting physical education and sports in Vietnamese schools has been happening at many places in the country (see: Anh Sang, 2021).

Franklin emphasized the importance of physical education. According to him, it should be an integral part of the curriculum of schools (R. Tait McKenzie M.D., LL.D., & R.C.A., 1936) as well as be a prominent part of learners’ duties (Cloyd, 1902). It is necessary to apply these ideas in Vietnam due to the above-mentioned context. Besides, the Vietnamese education is based on dialectical materialism (see: The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2019, Article 3.1). Therefore, considering the issue of attaching great importance to physical education from the perspectives of dialectical materialism, it needs to take practical actions. As Franklin made some concrete contributions to the physical education, such as teaching many of his friends the art of swimming, writing two papers on “*The Art of Swimming*” (Cloyd, 1902), and discovering a new method for an effective swim, some practical actions to develop the physical education in Vietnam, such as enhancing facility investment and fostering educators in terms of professional qualification and knowledge, should be undertaken. And as Franklin used his strong point, which is swimming skills, to best serve the development of physical education in his country, citizens in Vietnam should be encouraged to make use of their forte in sports to serve the physical education of the country in the best way.

4. Conclusion

There are various viewpoints in Benjamin Franklin’s educational thought. This paper finds two prominent “umbrella” ones, namely, views of educational forms (school-education form and self-education form) and views of educational domains (moral education and physical education). *Two basic things they have in common is connectivity and practicality* – concerning the first form, the autonomy in school-administration should exist in the *connection* to state management; regarding the second form, self-education can be done in a *co-operative way*; respecting the first domain, moral education content and method must be *practical*; and touching the second domain, Franklin strongly advocated a practical physical education when he made many concrete contributions to the physical education of his country. *It can be seen that these views are close to the views of*

Marxism. Indeed, reading “The Communist Manifesto” of Marx and Engels, it can be seen that education is determined by social relations (see: Marx & Engels, 1848); and undeniably, relation requires connection. Besides, Marxism also indicated the dialectical relation between theory and practice (see: Lenin, Collected Works, Volume 38, 1976). As a result, Franklin is really worthy to be praised as a “*part of the intellectual tradition of thinkers who made a contribution to the development of Marxism*” (Aiken, 1966, p.378).

From Franklin’s educational views, this study finds four important lessons learned that are feasible to apply in the current educational context of Vietnam, as follows: lessons learned about the autonomy in educational administration, lessons learned about building a learning society, lessons learned about moral education, and lessons learned about physical education. They are all appropriate for the education of Vietnam today, especially in the context of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education and “*international cooperation in education development to meet the requirements for international integration*” (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 2013, B, I, 7).

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Conflict of Interest Statement

This is a research product of the authors, not copied, cut, or used from any other research product. No academic conflict, beneficial.

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