



PATRIOTIC EDUCATION FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN HO CHI MINH CITY: CURRENT SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Abstract:

Patriotic education is a fundamental component of moral and civic formation for university students, particularly in the context of rapid digital transformation and globalization. This paper examines the current situation of patriotic education for university students in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Vietnam, identifying key challenges and proposing practical solutions adapted to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Drawing on qualitative analysis of educational policy documents, institutional reports, and relevant literature, the study finds that while patriotic content is formally integrated into curricula, student engagement remains limited due to conventional pedagogical approaches. The paper argues that innovative, technology-enhanced, and experiential learning methods are essential to revitalize patriotic education and strengthen national identity among the new generation of Vietnamese youth. Recommendations are offered for educators, institutional leaders, and policymakers.

Keywords: patriotic education, university students, Ho Chi Minh City, civic identity, digital age, higher education in Vietnam

1. Introduction

In an era defined by globalization, rapid technological advancement, and shifting cultural landscapes, the question of how to cultivate national identity and patriotic values among young people has become increasingly complex. For Vietnam — a nation with a rich history of resistance, sacrifice, and reconstruction — patriotic education (giao duc long yeu nuoc) remains a cornerstone of moral and civic formation in the educational system. Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), as Vietnam's largest urban center and economic hub, presents a unique and challenging context for patriotic education. Its university student population, estimated at over one million, is highly diverse, digitally connected, and

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exposed to global cultural influences. This demographic context makes the traditional, lecture-based approaches to patriotic education increasingly insufficient.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has fundamentally transformed how young people access information, form identities, and engage with social values. Social media, digital platforms, and online communities now serve as primary spaces where national identity is either reinforced or contested. In this environment, educators and policymakers face the dual challenge of preserving core patriotic values while adapting their pedagogical strategies to resonate with a digitally native student generation.

This paper aims to:

- 1) analyze the current situation of patriotic education for university students in HCMC;
- 2) identify key challenges in implementation; and
- 3) propose evidence-informed solutions to strengthen patriotic education effectiveness in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Patriotic Education

Patriotic education, broadly defined, encompasses the set of organized activities, curriculum content, and institutional practices aimed at cultivating love for one's country, national pride, civic responsibility, and commitment to national development (Print, 2007; Kennedy, 2007). It operates across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions — shaping what students know about their nation's history and culture, how they feel about national identity, and how they act as responsible citizens.

In the Vietnamese context, patriotic education is deeply embedded in Ho Chi Minh Thought and the official educational philosophy of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The Resolution 29-NQ/TW (2013) on fundamental and comprehensive education reform emphasizes the development of 'comprehensive human beings' who possess both professional competence and strong patriotic values (Ministry of Education and Training [MOET], 2013).

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) propose a useful typology of citizenship education — personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented citizenship — that can help frame the goals of patriotic education in higher education. While traditional approaches in Vietnam have largely emphasized the first type, there is growing recognition of the need to cultivate participatory and critical civic engagement among university students.

2.2 Patriotic Education in the Digital Age

The emergence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has profoundly altered the conditions under which patriotic education operates. Castells (2010) argues that identity formation in the network society is increasingly mediated by digital platforms, creating both opportunities and threats for national identity construction. For Vietnamese university students in HCMC, daily engagement with global social media platforms such as

Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram exposes them to diverse – and sometimes conflicting – narratives about Vietnamese history, culture, and national identity.

Research on civic education in the digital age highlights both the affordances and challenges of technology integration. On one hand, digital tools can enhance student engagement, facilitate access to historical archives, and enable creative forms of patriotic expression (Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014). On the other hand, misinformation, anti-state content, and the trivialization of national symbols pose significant risks that educators must address (Nguyen, 2021). In the HCMC context, Tran and Le (2020) found that university students' primary sources of information about Vietnamese history are increasingly digital rather than classroom-based, underscoring the urgency of adapting patriotic education to the digital ecosystem.

3. Current Situation of Patriotic Education for University Students in HCMC

3.1 Policy and Institutional Framework

Patriotic education in Vietnamese universities is governed by a comprehensive policy framework. At the national level, Directive 05-CT/TW (2016) of the CPV Politburo on 'Promoting the study and following of Ho Chi Minh's ideology, morality, and lifestyle' mandates the integration of patriotic content across all educational levels. The MOET's curriculum guidelines require universities to include compulsory modules on Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the History of the Vietnamese Communist Party – all of which contain substantial patriotic education components.

In HCMC specifically, the City Party Committee and the HCMC Department of Education and Training have issued supplementary directives emphasizing the role of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (Doan Thanh nien) in implementing patriotic education activities at the campus level. Activities such as 'March of Gratitude' campaigns, visits to war memorials, and participation in national commemoration events are organized annually across HCMC universities.

3.2 Key Challenges

Despite this institutional framework, several significant challenges undermine the effectiveness of patriotic education in HCMC universities.

First, pedagogical conventionalism remains a persistent obstacle. The predominant mode of delivery continues to rely on didactic instruction, rote memorization, and one-way information transmission. This approach is widely perceived by students as abstract, disconnected from their lived experiences, and insufficiently engaging (Le, 2019). Survey findings from multiple HCMC universities indicate that a substantial proportion of students view mandatory political education modules as formalistic obligations rather than meaningful learning experiences.

Second, the digital information environment creates competing narratives. HCMC students, highly active on social media, are simultaneously exposed to official patriotic narratives and alternative or critical perspectives circulated online. Without adequate

critical media literacy education, students may be ill-equipped to navigate these competing information streams effectively.

Third, the gap between curriculum content and contemporary relevance is notable. Much of the formal patriotic education curriculum focuses on historical events and revolutionary heritage, with limited attention to contemporary expressions of patriotism such as environmental stewardship, economic contribution, or digital citizenship. This disconnect reduces the perceived relevance of patriotic education among younger generations.

Fourth, assessment practices fail to capture affective and behavioral dimensions of patriotic development. Current evaluation systems primarily assess cognitive knowledge recall rather than the depth of students' patriotic values, commitment, or civic participation.

4. Proposed Solutions

4.1 Integrating Digital Tools and Online Platforms

Universities in HCMC should systematically incorporate digital technologies into patriotic education delivery. This includes developing interactive online learning modules about Vietnamese history and national identity, utilizing social media platforms to disseminate engaging patriotic content, and creating virtual reality (VR) experiences that allow students to immerse themselves in key historical events. The development of dedicated mobile applications incorporating gamification elements, historical archives, and peer-discussion forums can significantly enhance student engagement and knowledge retention.

4.2 Experiential and Project-Based Learning

A fundamental reorientation of pedagogical approaches is required to move beyond passive knowledge transmission toward active, experiential learning. Project-based learning (PBL) models offer a promising framework: students can undertake community service projects, oral history documentation initiatives, cultural heritage preservation activities, or entrepreneurial ventures with explicit patriotic dimensions. Such activities allow students to express and develop patriotic values through meaningful action rather than abstract declaration.

4.3 Curriculum Reform and Contemporary Relevance

Patriotic education curricula should be revised to incorporate contemporary expressions of patriotism alongside traditional historical content. Topics such as environmental protection, sustainable development, national economic competitiveness, digital sovereignty, and international cultural exchange can be framed as modern manifestations of love for the country. Furthermore, interdisciplinary integration of patriotic themes across professional disciplines can strengthen students' appreciation of the connection between their chosen careers and national development.

4.4 Media Literacy and Critical Thinking

Given the complex digital information environment in which HCMC students operate, patriotic education must be complemented by robust media literacy and critical thinking education. Students should be equipped with the skills to critically evaluate historical narratives, identify misinformation, and engage constructively with diverse perspectives on national identity. This approach does not undermine patriotism but rather strengthens it by cultivating a more reflective, informed, and resilient form of national attachment.

4.5 Assessment Reform

Assessment practices in patriotic education should be redesigned to evaluate attitudinal, behavioral, and civic participation dimensions in addition to cognitive knowledge. Portfolio-based assessments, civic engagement logs, reflection journals, and peer evaluation of community projects can provide richer evidence of students' patriotic development.

5. Discussion

The findings of this analysis suggest that the effectiveness of patriotic education in HCMC universities is fundamentally constrained by a mismatch between pedagogical approaches and the characteristics of the contemporary student population. University students in HCMC are not disengaged from patriotic values per se; rather, they are disengaged from the conventional forms in which patriotic education is delivered. This distinction has important implications for policy and practice.

The proposed solutions are consistent with broader trends in citizenship and civic education research internationally. The shift toward experiential, participatory, and digitally mediated approaches has demonstrated effectiveness across diverse national contexts (Print, 2007; Loader et al., 2014). Adapting these approaches to the specific cultural, historical, and institutional context of HCMC requires careful attention to local conditions, including the central role of the Youth Union, the significance of revolutionary heritage, and the unique urban dynamics of Vietnam's largest city.

It is important to acknowledge that patriotic education in Vietnam operates within a specific political-educational framework that simultaneously enables and constrains pedagogical innovation. The solutions proposed are designed to work within and strengthen this framework rather than challenge its fundamental premises. The goal is not to replace the existing policy architecture but to reinvigorate its implementation through more effective, student-centered, and contextually relevant approaches.

6. Conclusion

Patriotic education for university students in Ho Chi Minh City stands at a critical juncture. The rapid pace of digital transformation, globalization, and generational change demands a fundamental rethinking of how patriotic values are cultivated, transmitted,

and assessed in higher education. This paper has identified key challenges in the current implementation of patriotic education in HCMC universities and proposed a set of evidence-informed solutions centered on digital integration, experiential learning, curriculum reform, media literacy, and assessment innovation.

Effective patriotic education in the digital age requires moving beyond formalistic compliance toward genuine value formation — cultivating university students who love their country not because they are required to, but because they understand, appreciate, and feel a living connection to Vietnam's past, present, and future. This transformation demands sustained commitment from educators, institutional leaders, policymakers, and students themselves.

Future research should examine the effectiveness of specific digital and experiential patriotic education interventions through empirical, longitudinal studies, as well as explore comparative perspectives from other Southeast Asian contexts facing similar challenges of national identity formation in the digital age.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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