Preparation of Papers for The 11th BENJAMIT Network National & International Conference

On the mode of online education in the new normal state in Vietnam

Thai Tran Quang [1], Thua Huynh Kim [2]

[1] Departmnent of Academic Affairs, Dong Thap University, Dong Thap Province, 084, Vietnam.
[2] Faculty of Political Theory, Mien Tay Construction University, Vinh Long Province, 084, Vietnam.

Abstract

The online educational mode has been popular in many countries all over the world. It seems to have many advantages as compared with the face-to-face educational one when being performanced under some certain circumstances. In Vietnam, the performance of online educational mode as a situational solution during the Covid-19 pandemic prevention period, and as an alternative to a new normal state. This paper focuses on how the online educational mode oparete in Vietnamse educational system in the new normal state. We clarify the context in which the online educational mode being operated in Vietnamse educational system; analyzing the advantages and challenges related to the online educational mode in comparison to the face-to-face educational one on data from some surveys; and suggesting some significances for educational policy.

Keywords: *Mode of online education, the new normal context, the Covid-19 pandemic.*

Background and Statement of the problem

Since its outbreak in late 2019, the number of people infected by the Covid-19 pandemic has increased rapidly worldwide. As a consequence, to prevent this disease from further spreading many countries have practiced the measure of *social distancing*, i.e. reducing or inhibiting social activities involving large groups of people, especially in those specific areas with patients increasing. Unfortunately, this measure has somehow interrupted or even broken down the normal rhythm of social life, causing certain disturbances and negative consequences in virtually all aspects of life (i.e. economy, transport, tourism, education, medical care, and so on). Education is deemed to be substantially affected by this pandemic and accordingly, many countries have been widely applying the online-education mode as an alternative pedagogy to the traditional one.

Vietnam, being affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, has changed many activities throughout the country to adapt to this new normal context. Thus, educational activities in Vietnam have been performed in a number of different ways and modes in comparison to those before the the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. In order to effectively function the educational system in the new normal state, the advantages and challenges of these changes need to be identified in detail.

Objectives

In this paper, we will compare the educational mode in the normal state (i.e. before the Covil-19 pandemic outbreak) and that one in the new normal context (after the Covid-19 pandemic) in Vietnam. Then, we discuss the advantages and challenges of the educational mode in the new normal context, and thereby we recommend some relevant educational policies to be implemented in the new normal context of Vietnam.

Expected benefits

This study is supposed to provide the detailed understanding of

(1) the distinct transformation of the educational mode in Vietnam since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak throughout the country;

(2) the advantages and challenges of the educational mode in the new normal state of Vietnam;

(3) some relevant educational management policies recommended in this new normal state.

Conceptual Framework

A new normal state, according to the website (www.dictionary.com), can be defined as "a current situation or a social custom, that is different from what has been experienced or done before but is expected to become usual or typical." Meanwhile, en.wikipedia.org defines this construct as "a state in which an economy or society is settled down following a crisis, when this differs from the situation that prevailed prior to the start of the crisis. The term has been employed after the World War I, the financial crisis of 2007-2008, the September 11 attacks, the 2008–2012 global recession, and now the Covid-19 pandemic."

The emergence of a new strain called *Corona* recently (discovered in late 2019) has spread around the globe, so far having caused millions of people to be infected and dead. The World Health Organization announced the global pandemic and named it *the Covid-19 pandemic*. In effect, this disease has created such a profound disturbance in all aspects of life that normal social activities in many countries had to be fundamentally adjusted, ranging from downscaling, suspending to freezing communications, productions and circulations, both nationally and internationally. Concurrently, quite a number of preventive vaccination programs have been developed and exercised in many countries (such as the United States, Britain, Russia, Singapore, and Vietnam). Added to this, most social activities, including those in education, have been transformed to a "new normal" state.

According to www.en.wikipedia.org, "Education is the process of facilitating learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits. Educational methods include teaching, training, storytelling, discussion and directed research. Education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators. Learners, however, can also educate themselves. Education can take place in formal or informal settings and any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. The methodology of teaching is called *pedagogy*." Similarly, www.britannica.com defines, "Education is concerned with methods of teaching and learning in schools or school-like environments as opposed to various nonformal and informal means of socialization (e.g., rural development projects and education through parent-child relationships). Education can be thought of as the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. In this sense, it is equivalent to what social scientists term socialization or enculturation."

It has been generally known that the education sector in many countries during the Covid-19 pandemic had to transform itself from the traditional educational mode to the online one, properly utilizing information technology for interactions between teachers and learners. The online educational mode has definitely resulted in significant changes in the pedagogical process towards the goals of education.

Research Methodology

This study investigates available documents and research reports related to educational activities and management policies from institutions and universities in Vietnam since the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak. These documents and reports are:

- Official Letter No.550/BGDĐT-GDTC, February 25, 2020 on implementing measures to prevent and control Covid-19 pandemic in schools, issued by MOET (Ministry of Education & Training) [1];

- Official Letter No.793/BGDĐT-GDTrH, March 12, 2020 on enhancing teaching on the Internet and on television during the Covid-19 pandemic, issued by MOET [2];

- Official Letter No.795/BGDĐT-GDĐH, March 13, 2020 on guiding institutions to deploy distance training for formal training courses, both regular and in-service study, issued by MOET [3];

- Official Letter No. 988/BGDĐT-GDĐH, March 23, 2020 on ensuring the quality of distance training during the Covid-19 pandemic prevention, issued by MOET [4];

- Nha Trang University's quick survey on the online learning [5];

- BEAN Survey: E-learning in Vietnam before and after the Covid-19 outbreak [6];

- Ha Noi Medical University, the online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic [7].

Research Results

After a period of suspension on teaching activities due to the Covid-19 breakout and spreading in Vietnam, MOET (of Vietnam) has issued many policies for educational plans, educational programs, and educational modes throughout the country in order to ensure the achievement of educational objectives and the health safety of students and teachers.

These include Official Letter No. 550/BGDĐT-GDTC, February 25, 2020 on implementing measures to prevent and control the Covid-19 pandemic in schools [1]. Accordingly, in order to prepare preschool children, pupils and students to go back to school after the suspension period, MOET required all the educational institutions to apply the following measures: cleaning enitre schools and classrooms; preparing specific places to wash hands with clean, soapy water; guiding teachers and school staffs to apply pandemic prevention procedures; adjusting the educational plans to suit the actual conditions of the school; teachers guiding, monitoring and regularly reminding students to take measures for pandemic prevention.

This was an essential preparatory step all over the country for teaching activities and obtaining the school year's objectives. However, the pandemic situation at that time had not been controlled yet, and social distancing was ongoing. Thus, teaching and learning activities had to be suspensed again. If this situation was prolonged, the school year's objectives would not be guaranteed as planned. Furthermore, it would also negatively affect the psychology of students and parents. In order to deal with this situation, MOET continued to issue the Official Letter No.793/BGDĐT-GDTrH dated 12/3/2020 on teaching on the Internet and on television during the pandemic [2]. Accordingly, schools should review and streamline teaching lessons, developing teaching plans to organize teaching on the Internet and on television appropriately. After that, on getting back to school, teachers should spend time reviewing and evaluating students' learning results through the Internet and on television.

The actual results of this policy have not been officially surveyed, but the public opinion generally agreed that the policy has timely helped to ensure the above-mentioned teaching plans and educational objectives nationally, preventing many disturbances, protecting the health and safety of students and teachers against the risk of infection. However, this policy also faced challenges, namely the information infrastructure and digital data warehouse did not meet the requirements yet; teachers did not have enough teaching skills via television and online; students did not have sufficient skills to learn via television and online; a lack of conditions to form emotional, psychological, personality, practical experience of students; a lack of uniformity in the conditions of learning equipment via television and online of students in different regions; it is difficult for parents to arrange time to support their children learning through television and online. In short, the biggest limitation is the difficulty for learners to access the quality of education.

Regarding higher education, before the pandemic spread rapidly on a large scale, on March 13, 2020, MOET issued Official Letter No.795/BGDDT-GDĐH on guiding educational institutions to deploy distance training for formal courses, both regular and in-service study [3]. On March 23, 2020, MOET issued another Official Letter No.988/BGDDT-GDĐH on ensuring the quality of distance training during the Covid-19 pandemic prevention [4]. Accordingly, universities and colleges across the country have implemented online educational mode.

To evaluate the practical results of the policies mentioned above, a quick survey [5] involving nearly 4,000 university students showed that most students said that online-learning was less effective than learning in the classroom. However, the survey results also indicated that some positive parameters such as 90% of students participating in the online courses and many of them stated that online learning helped improve skills in accessing information technology and proactive learning. Additionally, it revealed that the majority of the students studied online via smartphones and most did not have a sufficient wireless-internet access for online learning. Up to 85% students believed that online learning was less effective than traditional learning (face-to-face learning in the classroom) and 36% reported that they did encounter harassment in the online learning. Approximately 14-18% students said that lecturers did not adjust their teaching methods suitable for the online mode, and they simply uploaded the lectures on the learning management system, having little interaction with learners. Meanwhile, 64% students stated that teachers assigned a large amount of homework and weekly tests. Moreover, lecturers required students to perform a lot of reading.

This quick survey identified several causes for the situation under investigation. Accordingly, nearly 80% students said that the network was frequently weak and they were dropped out of the Zoom system or unable to hear clearly the lecturers' sayings. Also, 68% of them agreed that online learning caused headaches, earaches, eye pain due to sitting for long periods of time looking at the computer/smartphone screen. Besides, 62% students stated that the online learning was difficult for them to focus on learning because the surrounding environment was often noisy or influenced by external factors. This educational mode also limited the interaction and exchange between learners and teachers, leading to the fact that students got bored easily.

Meanwhile, the report from Hanoi Medical University (released in April 2020) [7] showed that more than 6,000 students participated in the online courses provided by 31 Departments/Faculties with 424 online lectures and online teaching softwares, including Meeting, WEBINAR, and Zoom. The positive results were to meet the training plans of the school year, but there were a number of limitations, namely a lack of sufficient online teaching and learning skills, information infrastructure, and material warehouse.

In the same vein, BEAN Survey (conducted in April 2020) [6] indicated that only 56.4% of 218 surveyed students took part in online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Among them, high schoolers scored 58.8%, university and vocational training group 58.4%, but the postgraduate group was only 39.1% (See Chart 1 below).
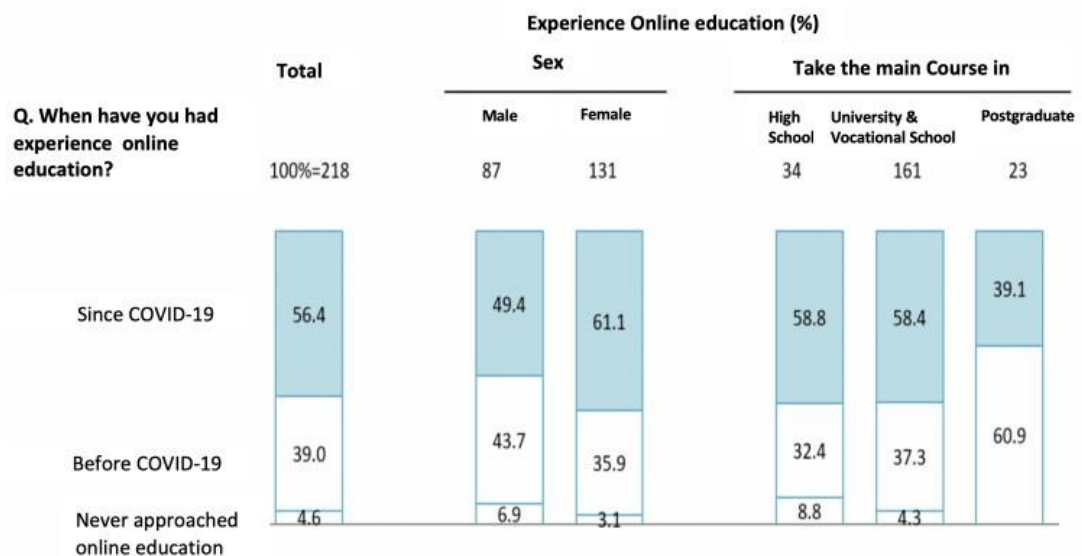
Chart 1. Experience online education of students (Source: BEAN Survey)

Also, according to BEAN survey, approximately one thirds of the students participating in the survey had experienced the online learning in some ways. Among them, 76.5% took video lessons (asynchronous communication), and 62.4% experienced the classroom directly with the teacher through support platforms (synchronous communication). In addition, it releaved that students took the online learning in foreign language courses (67.1%), computer skills (45.9%) and soft skills (35.3%).

As can be seen from Chart 2, the respondents expressed their recommendations for the online learning improvement. These included: "There should be high speed and more stable Internet" (71.1%), "schools should have more comfortable and quieter learning environments" (54.9%), "teachers' instruction should be improved" (53.8%), and "Learning software should be easier to use" (51.4%).

4

Support Factors Online education (%)

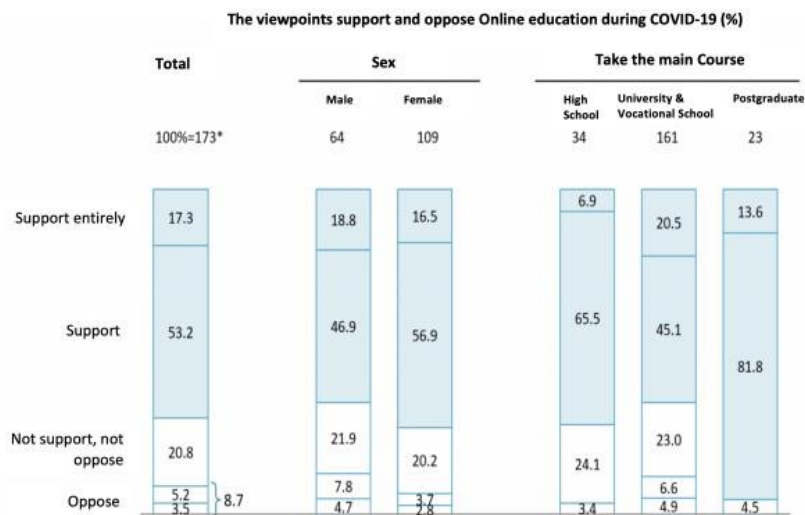| Q. For you, what support factors should be improved for Online education easier and more convenient in the future?	Total	Sex		Take the main Course		
		Male	Female	High School	University & Vocational School	Postgraduate
100%=173*		64	109	34	161	23
Stable internet speed	71.1	75.0	68.8	69.0	72.1	68.2
Quiet, comfortable Online learning environment	54.9	64.1	49.5	58.6	51.6	68.2
Teachers instruction	53.8	46.9	57.8	48.3	55.7	50.0
Easy to use Online education Software	51.4	50.0	52.3	58.6	50.8	45.5
Good equipment	42.8	51.6	37.6	55.2	40.2	40.9
Discuss, share with classmate	37.0	39.1	35.8	24.1	40.2	36.4
Encouraged, supported by family	19.1	25.0	15.6	24.1	15.6	31.8

*173/218 respondents are taking the main course online

Chart 2. Support factors should be improved for Online education easier (Source: BEAN

As shown in Chart 3, the majority of students (aged 16 and over) agreed that online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic was the most feasible and practical option. Only less than 9% opposed it and came up with other ideas such as "letting students make arrangements on getting back to school", and "letting students learn and review by themselves." However, the support rate of the postgraduate group was especially high (95.4%) with the majority of them working and participating in Master and PhD courses at the same time.

The viewpoints support and oppose Online education during COVID-19 (%)

	Total	Sex		Take the main Course		
		Male	Female	High School	University & Vocational School	Postgraduate
100%=173*		64	109	34	161	23
Support entirely	17.3	18.8	16.5	6.9	20.5	13.6
Support	53.2	46.9	56.9	65.5	45.1	81.8
Not support, not oppose	20.8	21.9	20.2	24.1	23.0	
Oppose	5.2 / 3.5 } 8.7	7.8 / 4.7	3.7 / 2.8	3.4	6.6 / 4.9	4.5

*173/218 respondents are taking the main course online

Chart 3. The viewpoints support or oppose decision of Online main course during COVID-19 outbreak (Source: BEAN Survey)

Regarding the efficiency of the online learning and that of the traditional one in comparison, the second option was rated higher by the majority (67.6%), while only 46.2% of students currently enrolled in an online primary course wanted to get back to school after the Covid-19 pandemic was controlled, and 35.5% wanted a form of learning with the combination of mainly the face-to-face classroom and the online learning supplemented. Only 4.6% gave a higher priority to the online learning (See Chart 4 below).
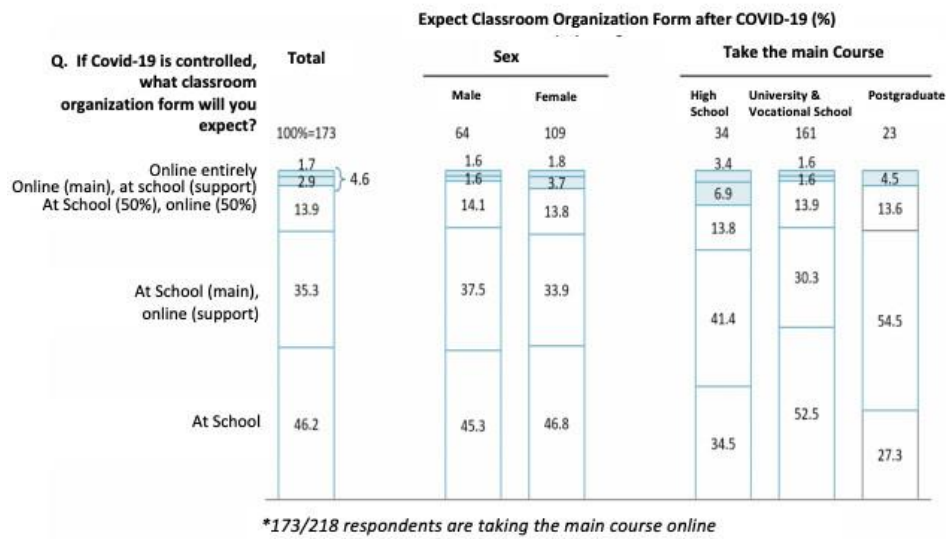
Expect Classroom Organization Form after COVID-19 (%)

Q. If Covid-19 is controlled, what classroom organization form will you expect?	Total	Sex		Take the main Course		
		Male	Female	High School	University & Vocational School	Postgraduate
100%=	173	64	109	34	161	23
Online entirely	1.7	1.6	1.8	3.4	1.6	4.5
Online (main), at school (support)	2.9	1.6	3.7	6.9	1.6	
At School (50%), online (50%)	13.9	14.1	13.8	13.8	13.9	13.6
At School (main), online (support)	35.3	37.5	33.9	41.4	30.3	54.5
At School	46.2	45.3	46.8	34.5	52.5	27.3

*173/218 respondents are taking the main course online

Chart 4. Classroom Organization Form (main course) are expected after COVID-19 (Source: BEAN Survey)

The fact that the Internet connection was slow and frequently interrupted resulted in a lower preference for the online learning in comparison to that of the traditional one. However, 71.1% respondents stated that they currently enrolled in main online courses (See Chart 5 below).
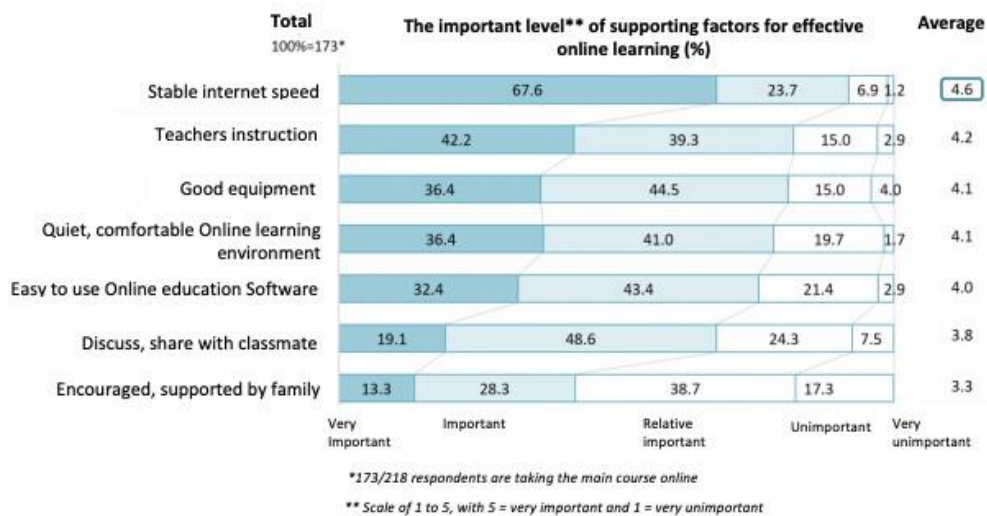
	Total 100%=173*	The important level** of supporting factors for effective online learning (%)					Average
Stable internet speed		67.6	23.7	6.9	1.2		4.6
Teachers instruction		42.2	39.3	15.0	2.9		4.2
Good equipment		36.4	44.5	15.0	4.0		4.1
Quiet, comfortable Online learning environment		36.4	41.0	19.7	1.7		4.1
Easy to use Online education Software		32.4	43.4	21.4	2.9		4.0
Discuss, share with classmate		19.1	48.6	24.3	7.5		3.8
Encouraged, supported by family		13.3	28.3	38.7	17.3		3.3

Very Important | Important | Relative important | Unimportant | Very unimportant

*173/218 respondents are taking the main course online

** Scale of 1 to 5, with 5 = very important and 1 = very unimportant

Chart 5. The important level of supporting factors for effective online learning (Source: BEAN Survey)

Primary and secondary school students had difficulty with the online learning because not all of them understood the online lessons. Thus, the attendance rate was between 60-80% depending on the grade level. Students in grade 12 had the highest attendance rate due to the pressure of preparing for their graduation exams at the end of the school year. But, the rate tended to decline among younger students because their ability to manipulate computers for the online leraning was not qualified, while their parents were not always able to help them [5].

Since May 2020, Vietnam has removed the social distancing policy because it primarily controlled the Covid-19 pandemic spreading. As a result, the rhythm of social life in a new normal state was shaped with opening doors and preventing the pandemic reoccurance at the same time. Teaching activities returned to a new normal state, pupils and students went back to school according to the teaching plan and objectives of the 2020-2021 school year. The traditional mode (face-to-face) was

widely re-deployed in combination with the online one with more favorable conditions than before. This combination was deemed to be the best solution to resolve the conflict between the educational manager's requirements and the true quality of education during the periods of social fluctuations in the risks of the Covid-19 pandemic throughout the country.

At the meeting of the Steering Committee for the Prevention and Control of the Covid-19 held by MOET on February 4, 2021, Vietnam's Minister of Education and Training Phung Xuan Nha directed the whole educational sector to activate, expand and improve the efficiency of online educational mode. He said: "On the one hand, the whole sector needs to be proactive and positive, and on the other hand, it also needs to be calm and not to panic. Each level of education needs to build a disease-treating unit so that in each specific situation, it still ensures the dual goals: safety for students, teachers and maintaining the plan of teaching and learning in case students cannot go to school".

Summary of the Study

This study shows that the online educational mode implemented during the Covid-19 pandemic prevention period in Vietnam has fundamentally changed the mode of educational management by management officials, and also the mode of teaching and learning in a positive and negative directions. The positive point is that the promotion and application of information technology in teaching is an effective measure in a social age with unpredictable fluctuations, hindering the concentration and movement of the majority in a long period of time. The negative point is the inactivity of implementing the online educational mode in the state of not meeting the sufficient technical skills, psychological and professional requirements of related subjects, which can hardly ensure education is effective as expected.

Discussions

The implementation of the online educational mode in Vietnam during the Covid-19 pandemic prevention period holds certain differences as compared with the traditional educational one.

Firstly, the former requires a modern information and electronics infrastructure, available to meet the educational requirements for a large number of learners at the same time. If this situation is satisfied, the online educational mode will open up opportunities to connect global knowledge so that all learners in Vietnam can get access to the global digital database. This is what the traditional mode can never be able to provide (see [8]).

Second, the online educational mode requires teachers to have sufficient capacity and skills to teach with electronic devices, digital data storage, distance learning, not directly interacting with learners (see [11] and [10]). Most teachers in Vietnam are familiar with the traditional educational mode and teacher training universities have yet to include online teaching skills in the output standards of the training programs.

Thirdly, the online educational mode faces a of number challenges in helping learners form life skills, emotional psychology and personality due to the lack of practical experience and extracurricular activities while the traditional educational mode has an advantage in this point because in effect the school is also a playground. However, the advantage of the online educational mode for learners is the high personalization of knowledge content and curriculum ([9] and [10]).

Fourth, the online educational mode can negatively affect the physical and mental health of learners due to frequent interaction with screens, electronic devices and lack of social interaction while for the traditional educational mode, this is negligible.

Fifthly, the online educational mode poses challenges for young learners (15 years old and younger) due to the lack of learning skills and the use of electronic devices (see [9]).

Sixth, the online educational mode is challenging in mass deployment across the country because not all learners have the necessary electronics (see [10] and [8]).

Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the educational mode in Vietnam and the implementation of the online educational mode is only a temporary solution, but with its advantages and with the pandemic fluctuations in the new normal state, the implementation of combining the traditional educational mode with the online one can be an effective measure. Obviously, the inherent criteria and requirements of the online educational mode need to be fully met and then the quality of education and

training can be maintained and improved. It is the readiness of information infrastructure, of digital data, and of teachers and learners as well.

This research is only based on a number of surveys on the current status of the online educational mode in Vietnam during the Covid-19 pandemic prevention period. Therefore, some surveys to compare the results of education and training between the two educational modes should be done to consider more objectively the hypothesis that the online educational mode is less effective than the traditional one. Besides that, further reasearch on the impacts of the online educational mode on the emotional and psychological life of leaners are worth considering as well.

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