

FROM LITERACY ERADICATION TO DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE UNIVERSALIZATION: THE VALUE OF THE MASS EDUCATION DECREE IN THE ERA OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20050462>

Published Date: 06-May-2026

Abstract: The article clarifies the value of the Mass Education Decree in the process of transition from literacy eradication to digital knowledge universalization. On the basis of analyzing the context of its emergence and its historical values, the study affirms that the Decree established a model of mass education and the principle of ensuring people's access to knowledge.

In the context of digital transformation, the emergence of the digital divide raises the requirement to develop digital competence as a condition for participation in socio-economic life. The article indicates that the core value of the Decree lies in the principle of organizing education in accordance with learners' conditions of access, thereby continuing to provide orientation for digital knowledge universalization in the present period.

Keywords: Mass Education Decree; digital knowledge universalization; education; digital divide; digital competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Mass Education Decree issued by Ho Chi Minh in 1945 was introduced in a context where the intellectual level of the population was extremely low, when the majority of people could neither read nor write and had not yet possessed the capacity to participate in socio-political life as subjects with awareness.

Under such conditions, knowledge was not only a limiting factor of individuals, but became a bottleneck in the process of organizing and operating society. Therefore, the implementation of literacy eradication on a nationwide scale was not only aimed at improving the intellectual level, but also directly created the conditions for people to access information, understand policies, and step by step participate in social life as subjects.

From this reality, the right to education was established as a fundamental principle of the state system, associated with the requirement to ensure access to knowledge for the whole society. The intellectual level does not only reflect the level of understanding, but also expresses the degree of social autonomy in receiving and processing information. Education, therefore, does not stop at the function of transmitting knowledge, but is associated with the formation of civic consciousness, the consolidation of cognitive capacity, and the creation of conditions for individuals to exercise their rights and obligations on the basis of understanding.

Within this relationship, knowledge becomes the foundation connecting individuals with the social system, while at the same time ensuring the operation of political institutions in practice.

Entering the era of digital transformation, the conditions for the existence and operation of knowledge have undergone fundamental changes. Knowledge no longer exists mainly in traditional forms, but is formed, stored, and distributed in digital environments associated with technology and data.

This change gives rise to a new form of disparity among population groups, in which the capacity to use technology and process information becomes the decisive factor determining access to knowledge. The digital divide, therefore, not only reflects differences in conditions of access, but also reflects differences in the capacity to participate in social relations organized on digital platforms.

In this context, the intellectual level is no longer defined simply by literacy, but is associated with the capacity to use and master knowledge in digital environments. An individual may have access to technology but, without the ability to exploit and apply knowledge, will encounter difficulties in performing basic activities such as accessing public services, participating in the market, or processing information in daily life.

This change raises the requirement to reconsider the role of education in ensuring individuals' capacity to participate in society, not only in terms of receiving knowledge, but also in terms of using knowledge.

From this context, studying the value of the Mass Education Decree in the process of transition from literacy eradication to digital knowledge universalization is meaningful in clarifying a principle that has continuity in the organization of education. This principle is expressed in the fact that knowledge needs to be disseminated in accordance with learners' conditions of access, and at the same time directly associated with the ability to use it in practice.

On this basis, the article focuses on analyzing the historical value and the contemporary value of the Mass Education Decree, thereby affirming the role of education as a foundational factor in ensuring people's capacity for mastery in the digital society, while at the same time contributing to clarifying the relationship between knowledge, capacity, and social participation under new development conditions.

2. CONTENT

2.1. Context of Emergence and Basic Content of the Mass Education Decree

The Mass Education Decree promulgated on 8 September 1945 was the direct result of a historical requirement arising in the process of forming the Democratic Republic of Vietnam after the August Revolution.

During the preceding colonial period, the education system was limited in both scope and purpose, mainly serving the maintenance of the ruling apparatus, resulting in the situation where the majority of people had no opportunity to access knowledge. The consequence did not only stop at a low level of education, but also created a social structure in which people's capacity to access information, understand policies, and participate in social life was significantly restricted. With approximately 95% of the population being illiterate, knowledge became a scarce resource, concentrated in a small segment, while the majority of the population remained outside the process of acquiring and using knowledge.

Immediately after gaining power, the issue of raising the intellectual level of the population was identified as a fundamental requirement. In the first Government meeting on 3 September 1945, the task of combating "illiteracy" was placed on an equal footing with other major tasks of the nation. The statement "an illiterate nation is a weak nation" clearly reflects the relationship between the intellectual level and development capacity, while at the same time showing that knowledge was regarded as a condition for ensuring national strength.

The building of a state of the people, by the people, and for the people requires that people not only have rights, but also have the capacity to understand and exercise those rights. Under the condition that the majority of the population could neither read nor write, this principle could not yet be realized in practice.

Illiteracy, therefore, was not only a limitation in education, but also a structural barrier to the establishment of the relationship between the State and society. People who could not read or write could not access information, could not understand the content of policies, and could not participate in social life as subjects with awareness. The distance between state institutions and social life was therefore widened, reducing the operational capacity of the system. Political power, in this case, could not be fully exercised when the subjects of that power did not have the conditions to perform their roles. Literacy eradication was thus identified as a task with direct political and social significance, associated with consolidating the foundation of the new regime.

The promulgation of the Mass Education Decree marked the transition from political awareness to concrete administrative action. On 8 September 1945, the Government promulgated a series of important decrees such as Decree No. 17/SL establishing the Mass Education Department, Decree No. 19/SL requiring each locality to organize classes, and Decree No. 20/SL stipulating that learning the national language was compulsory and free for all people. This system of policies placed literacy eradication under the unified direction of the State, transforming education from a spontaneous activity into one that was organized and systematic.

Education in this context was not only an activity of knowledge transmission, but became an instrument for establishing cognitive capacity for society, thereby ensuring people's capacity to participate in socio-political relations.

The effectiveness of this mode of organization was clearly demonstrated in a short period after implementation. Within just one year, tens of thousands of classes were opened nationwide, with nearly one hundred thousand people participating in teaching and millions of people becoming literate. The movement was implemented under various conditions, from villages and agencies to evacuation areas and resistance zones, reflecting a high level of adaptability to practical circumstances. People made use of evenings or rest time from labor to study, showing that learning had become an activity directly associated with daily life, rather than being confined to the traditional classroom space.

The method of organizing teaching and learning was designed in a flexible manner, suitable to the conditions of learners. Learning content focused on the national language and basic reading and writing skills in order to directly serve daily life. This choice helped learners quickly acquire the necessary capacity and be able to use it immediately in practice. The adjustment of content, time, and location of learning according to specific conditions created the ability to expand the scale of education at low cost and with high speed of implementation. The achieved effectiveness shows that when knowledge is organized in accordance with conditions of access, the process of universalization can take place with high intensity without depending entirely on material resources (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021).

Teaching activities were implemented with broad participation from society. Literate individuals participated in teaching, and learners, after acquiring knowledge, continued to guide others, forming a network for the dissemination of knowledge within the community. This mechanism reduced dependence on specialized personnel, while at the same time creating the ability for continuous expansion of the movement. Knowledge was not only transmitted from top to bottom, but also disseminated through social relationships, helping to maintain and reinforce it in practice. The effectiveness of this model is reflected in the rapid speed of universalization and the ability to sustain results under difficult conditions (Do Hoang Linh, 2015).

The mode of organization of the Mass Education movement reflects a model of education that is mass-based, flexible, and closely associated with social life. Education was implemented directly within the living and working environment of the people, ensuring wide and effective access. Learning associated with practical needs helped to improve the intellectual level and form cognitive capacity, thereby creating a foundation for people to participate in social life as subjects with understanding.

The value of the Mass Education Decree, therefore, does not only lie in the results of literacy eradication in a specific period, but in the establishment of an approach capable of resolving the relationship between knowledge, capacity, and social participation, creating a foundation for the stable operation of the system in subsequent stages of development.

2.2. Historical Value of the Mass Education Decree for Vietnamese Education

The Mass Education Decree created a fundamental transformation in the way education is organized and accessed in Vietnam, when knowledge was, for the first time, placed in a direct relationship with the lives of the majority of the population. Before 1945, learning opportunities were mainly concentrated in a small segment of society, while the majority of people did not have conditions to access knowledge. This situation not only reflects limitations in education, but also reduces the capacity to access information and to participate in social relations. The implementation of the Mass Education movement directly changed that structure by expanding learning to the whole society, turning education into a common activity associated with daily life. Within a short period after the promulgation of the decrees, tens of thousands of classes were organized with the participation of tens of thousands of instructors, helping millions of people to become literate (Do Hoang Linh, 2015). This scale not only demonstrates the speed of implementation, but also shows the capacity to mobilize and organize education under conditions of limited resources when the approach is appropriate to practical conditions.

This transformation is clearly expressed in the mode of organizing education. Classes were not limited to formal school spaces, but were implemented in villages, agencies, and workplaces; learning time was arranged flexibly in accordance with people's daily rhythms. This mode of organization significantly reduced barriers to access, allowing different groups to participate in learning without interrupting their daily work. Education, therefore, was no longer a separate activity, but became a part of social life. The achieved effectiveness did not come from increasing resources in the traditional way, but from adjusting the mode of organization so as to be appropriate to the actual conditions of learners.

The selection of learning content in a simplified and practical direction clearly reflects the orientation of the policy. In a context where the majority of people had never attended school, focusing on the national language and basic reading and writing skills enabled learners to quickly acquire the necessary capacity for use in daily life. After becoming literate, people were able to access information, communicate, participate in production, and manage their personal lives. Learning content associated with usability created motivation for participation and maintained the continuity of the learning process. The relationship between educational content and the capacity for knowledge dissemination is clearly shown in the point that the more practical the content, the wider the scope of universalization (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021). This reflects a practical approach in which knowledge is selected not according to academic level, but according to its capacity to be transformed into capability.

The mechanism of organizing teaching based on community participation created an effective method of knowledge dissemination. Literate individuals participated in teaching, and learners, after acquiring knowledge, continued to guide others, forming a horizontal network of dissemination within society. This process did not depend entirely on a professional teaching workforce, but still ensured the capacity for expansion at a rapid speed. The fact that knowledge was transmitted from one person to another within familiar social relationships helped to reinforce and maintain knowledge in practice. This mechanism also reduced organizational costs and created sustainability for the movement, as each learner could become a link in the process of universalization (Do Hoang Linh, 2015).

The impact of the Mass Education movement did not stop at literacy eradication in a specific period, but also laid the foundation for educational approaches in subsequent stages. The implementation of universal primary education, moving toward universal lower secondary education, together with continuing education and supplementary education programs, demonstrates the direct continuation of the principle of bringing education closer to learners. These policies continued to expand opportunities for access to knowledge for disadvantaged groups, while maintaining flexibility in the organization of education. This approach shows that the effectiveness of adjusting organizational methods according to actual conditions has been verified and maintained in the development of education in practice (National Assembly, 2019).

The historical value of the Mass Education Decree is therefore expressed in the establishment of a system of principles capable of long-term operation. Education is expanded to the whole society, learning content is associated with practical needs, and a community-based mechanism of knowledge dissemination is formed as fundamental pillars. These principles not only created effectiveness in a specific period, but also have the capacity to adapt to different conditions of development. Laying the foundation for a model of education that is universal, flexible, and associated with life has created conditions for Vietnamese education to develop in a sustainable direction, while at the same time providing a practical basis for further policy adjustment in new contexts.

2.3. Value of the Mass Education Decree in the Era of Digital Transformation

Digital transformation not only expands tools of management or channels of access to information, but directly changes the conditions under which an individual can participate in social life.

When administrative procedures, economic transactions, and social relations operate on digital platforms, the capacity to use digital knowledge becomes the condition for individuals to actually "be present" in those relations. State power, when considered from the institutional perspective, is expanded through digitalization; however, in practical terms, its effectiveness is closely associated with the capacity of people to use it. The operational capacity of the system therefore depends not only on the level of technological development, but also on the degree to which cognitive capacity is widely distributed in society.

In the process of implementing online public services, this disparity in capacity becomes clearly evident. Under the same procedure and within the same system, some individuals are able to complete the entire process independently, while others must rely on intermediaries to carry out each step. The inability to master basic operations such as authentication,

submission of documents, or tracking processing progress creates a new form of dependency in the exercise of rights. Rights continue to exist in legal terms, but the way they are exercised is influenced by the individual's capacity. This changes the nature of the issue: the effectiveness of policy does not only lie in its design, but in the capacity of people to directly exercise their rights under specific conditions.

In economic life, this differentiation is more clearly expressed and has a direct impact on the position of actors. Individuals who are able to operate online business platforms, understand how to approach customers, and use digital tools can expand markets rapidly, reduce intermediary costs, and increase business efficiency. In contrast, many small traders, despite having products, are unable to participate because they do not know how to use platforms, leading to a narrowing of their scope of operation or dependence on intermediaries. This gap reflects not only differences in skills, but also differences in the capacity to participate in the new economic structure, thereby directly affecting the capacity for accumulation and development.

The labor market also operates according to a similar logic. Positions associated with digital platforms create more opportunities, but at the same time impose higher requirements for adaptability. Individuals who are capable of working in digital environments can move flexibly, access more options, and participate in new forms of labor. Others are gradually confined to jobs with lower stability and limited prospects for development. This disparity reflects the reality that cognitive capacity in digital environments is becoming a factor that shapes the social position of individuals, not only in the short term but also in long-term prospects.

Even in education, where expectations are placed on reducing disparities, digital transformation instead makes differences in the capacity for reception more evident. With the same content and the same platform, the level of access and understanding depends significantly on whether learners are able to use the tools. Knowledge may be provided, but not everyone is able to transform it into capacity. This shows that the issue does not lie in content, but in the conditions of access and the ability to apply knowledge within a specific environment. The gap in education, therefore, is no longer only a gap in learning opportunities, but becomes a gap in the capacity to use knowledge.

These developments show a structural characteristic: the digital divide is simultaneously a divide in the capacity to exercise rights and to participate in society. The value of the Mass Education Decree becomes clear when placed in this context. When state power is built on the foundation of the people's mastery, ensuring the capacity to access knowledge becomes a condition for rights to be realized in practice. In the past, the ability to read and write created the capacity to access information and participate in social life; today, digital competence plays a similar role in connecting individuals with a society that is increasingly organized on digital platforms. The change lies in the form of knowledge, while the requirement for the capacity of the subject maintains its continuity.

The value of the Decree, therefore, does not lie in the content of teaching literacy, but in the way of identifying and addressing the problem. When the conditions for participation in society are not ensured, policy must focus on creating that capacity for the entire society, rather than merely expanding opportunities in a formal sense. This approach directly resolves the contradiction between the requirements of the system and the actual capacity of the people, while ensuring the effectiveness of the system in operation.

In the present context, this logic continues to retain its orientational value. The development of technology opens up possibilities, but these possibilities only become reality when accompanied by the capacity to use them. The digital divide, therefore, reflects a gap in the capacity to participate in social life under new conditions. Enhancing people's cognitive capacity, which in the present context takes the form of digital competence, becomes a condition for ensuring participation, reducing disparities, and maintaining the effectiveness of the system in a rapidly changing environment.

Ultimately, the value of the Mass Education Decree lies in its capacity to orient the organization of policy in order to resolve the relationship between knowledge, capacity, and social participation in all stages of development.

2.4. Orientation for Promoting the Value of the Mass Education Decree in Vietnamese Education in the Period of Digital Transformation

Promoting the value of the Mass Education Decree in the context of digital transformation needs to be placed on the basis of adjusting educational objectives in accordance with changes in the conditions of social participation.

When knowledge is organized and distributed mainly in digital environments, the ability to use technology becomes the condition for individuals to access information, carry out transactions, and participate in socio-economic relations. The transition from literacy universalization to digital competence universalization is not only a change in educational content but also an adaptation of policy to a new form of knowledge. In this context, digital competence does not stop at operational skills but is directly associated with the ability to exercise rights and maintain individuals' presence in social life.

Digital knowledge universalization is constituted by three closely related components: the ability to use digital tools, the ability to exploit and process information, and the ability to participate in activities on digital platforms. These three components operate as an integrated whole, in which the lack of any component interrupts the process of transforming knowledge into practical capacity. An individual may have access to devices but, without the ability to process information, will find it difficult to make appropriate decisions; conversely, a person who has cognitive capacity but cannot operate on platforms is also unable to participate in specific activities. The synchronization of these components therefore becomes the condition for digital knowledge to truly realize its value in social life.

Educational content needs to be designed in a way that is directly associated with practical needs, ensuring that learners are able to use it immediately after acquisition. The inclusion of theoretical or academic technological content does not produce effectiveness if it is not associated with the ability to apply it. Priority should be given to skills such as using online public services, conducting electronic payments, protecting personal data, identifying risks in digital environments, and exploiting information from digital platforms. These are capacities directly related to people's daily behavior, from carrying out administrative procedures to participating in economic activities. Designing content in a simple, understandable, and immediately applicable manner not only shortens the gap between knowledge acquisition and use but also creates proactiveness in the learning process.

The mode of organizing education needs to be adjusted in a flexible manner, suitable for the conditions of different groups of learners. The traditional school model continues to play a foundational role but is no longer the only channel for knowledge universalization. The expansion of community-based learning forms, combining face-to-face and online modes, allows knowledge to come closer to people within familiar contexts. Local authorities play the role of organizing and coordinating digital skills training activities at the grassroots level, especially in rural, remote, and disadvantaged areas, and among population groups with limited access to technology. The model of community digital technology groups clearly demonstrates effectiveness when individuals with skills directly guide those without skills through specific operations. Learning processes taking place directly in practice enable learners to quickly form usage capacity and reduce psychological barriers toward technology.

The participation of technology enterprises creates conditions for linking digital competence universalization with practical use. Platforms and applications only achieve effectiveness when they are designed in accordance with the level of general users. Clear interfaces, simple procedures, and understandable language contribute to reducing access barriers and improving usability. Enterprises can also participate in training activities through providing instructional materials, organizing training sessions, or offering technical support at the local level. The coordination between the State and enterprises creates a closed loop from technology design to the formation of usage capacity, ensuring that digital transformation is realized in people's actual behavior.

Educational and social policies need to be adjusted toward ensuring inclusiveness in access to digital knowledge. The State plays a facilitating role through developing programs to enhance people's digital competence while investing in technological infrastructure in disadvantaged areas. Expanding internet networks, supporting devices, and reducing access costs create initial conditions for people to approach technology. Coordination mechanisms among the State, enterprises, and social organizations help mobilize resources and implement universalization activities in a synchronized manner. Evaluation systems need to be established with specific criteria such as the level of use of online public services, the rate of electronic transactions, the ability to exploit digital information, and the degree of autonomy in technological operations. These indicators directly reflect people's capacity to exercise rights in digital environments and allow policy adjustment according to different target groups.

The principle of organizing education in accordance with learners' actual conditions, established from the Mass Education Decree, continues to demonstrate its value in the present context. This principle allows the adjustment of content, methods, and implementation approaches in order to ensure access for all groups in society. The transition from literacy eradication to digital competence universalization expands the scope of knowledge that needs to be disseminated, while maintaining

the fundamental nature of mass education as ensuring people's capacity for social participation. The value of the Decree is expressed in its ability to orient the organization of policy in accordance with new conditions, in which enhancing society's cognitive capacity becomes the foundation for ensuring the effectiveness of state power and the stable operation of socio-economic life.

3. CONCLUSION

The Mass Education Decree was promulgated in a context where the capacity of society to access knowledge did not meet the requirements for the operation of the system, and the policy directly addressed that issue through the universalization of literacy for the people. The organization of learning in association with daily life ensured that knowledge did not remain at the level of reception, but step by step became cognitive and practical capacity, creating a foundation for actual social participation.

Under present conditions, the issue is no longer the ability to read and write, but the ability to use knowledge in digital environments. Limitations in technological operations, as well as in the exploitation and processing of information, cause a segment of the population to face difficulties in accessing services, participating in the market, and exercising basic rights. This disparity in capacity gives rise to the digital divide, while at the same time directly affecting the degree of individual participation in society in the context of digital transformation.

The mode of organization of the Mass Education movement demonstrates an orientation of long-term value: knowledge only truly has meaning when it is received under conditions appropriate to learners and is used in real life. When knowledge shifts to exist primarily in digital environments, the capacity to use technology becomes the condition for individuals to access and apply knowledge. Ensuring that each individual is able to use digital tools and exploit information therefore needs to be considered a foundational requirement of education, and at the same time a condition for ensuring the capacity for social participation in the present period.

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