

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S EDUCATIONAL VIEWPOINTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE EDUCATION¹

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Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), one of the Founding Fathers of the United States as well as a prominent historical figure of early America, was esteemed as the philosopher who led this nation into the Enlightenment era. Owing to his substantial contributions to the philosophy of education, he is mentioned in encyclopedias dedicated to the field of educational philosophy. His educational views are remarkably distinctive and merit careful consideration. However, to date, his thoughts on education remain insufficiently clarified. Accordingly, this paper focuses on elucidating several fundamental aspects of his educational thought from a philosophical perspective, while identifying certain implications for contemporary Vietnamese education.

Keywords: Benjamin Franklin, educational viewpoints, philosophy of education, Vietnamese education

INTRODUCTION

Education has always been one of the foremost priorities of any nation worldwide. However, it cannot fully accomplish its mission effectively without a profound alliance with philosophy, for philosophy, with its foundational analyses of worldviews and methodologies, holds a paramount role in the specific sciences, including the field of educational science. This underscores the importance of exploring pedagogical foundations from a philosophical perspective. For Vietnam, in the context of the current fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training, this has become even more urgent.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), one of the towering figures in early American history, was a remarkably versatile historical figure – he was a statesperson, a

physicist, a writer, a printer, a philosopher, and an educational reformer (see Cook 2010). “Like many other eighteenth-century figures of philosophical interest, he was the author of letters and essays rather than interconnected systematic treatises” (Campbell 1999, 298). The history of the philosophy of education has acknowledged his substantial contributions, which have been recorded in encyclopedias on educational philosophy, such as the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Education* (Chambliss 1996) and the *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy* (Phillips 2014). However, up to the present, his educational thought remains inadequately discussed (see Cook 2010).

Based on the analyses outlined above, an academic exploration of Benjamin Franklin’s educational ideas can be considered an essential scholarly endeavor to contribute to the advancement of the field of philosophy of education. In addition, deriving implications for contemporary Vietnamese education from his educational thought is both significant and urgent, particularly in the context of Vietnam’s ongoing international integration in the field of education.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN’S VIEWPOINTS ON SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Franklin asserted that educational institutions ought to possess autonomy in their governance. In his widely recognized work, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania [sic]*, Franklin (1931, 6-7) articulated a progressive vision wherein citizens were entrusted with the authority to establish and administer educational institutions, stating:

It is propos’d [sic] THAT some Persons of Leisure and publick [sic] Spirit, apply for a CHARTER, by which they may be incorporated, with Power to erect an ACADEMY for the Education of Youth, to govern the same, provide Masters, make Rules, receive Donations, purchase Lands, &c. and to add to their Number from Time to Time such other Persons as they shall judge suitable.

However, Franklin advocated for an educational management mechanism in which school administration should be placed under the oversight of state educational authorities. In *Hints for Consideration Respecting the Orphan School-house in Philadelphia*, Franklin (1907, 126) wrote:

CHARITABLE Institutions [sic], however originally well intended and well executed at first for many Years, are subject to be in a Course of time corrupted, mismanag’d [sic], their Funds misapplied or perverted to private purposes. Would it not be well to guard against these by prudent Regulations respecting the Choice of Managers, and establishing the Power of inspecting their Conduct in some permanent Body, as the Monthly or Quarterly Meeting?

Therefore, it can be said that Franklin advocated for the independent management of educational institutions while emphasizing the necessity of governmental oversight to ensure the consistent preservation and enhancement of educational quality. This progressive viewpoint of Franklin reflects a nuanced reconciliation between the self-governance of educational institutions and the governmental mandate to safeguard the public welfare, thereby achieving both individual liberty and collective societal interests. It deeply reflects the dialectical nature of educational institutional governance, wherein autonomy embodies both individual and collective dimensions.

Nonetheless, Franklin maintained that the exercise of autonomy in educational institutions should be fundamentally oriented toward the public welfare, rather than being confined to the pursuit of the private interests of the institutions themselves. This inference is drawn from Franklin's articulation of the interests of learners and community; in other words, the interests of citizens and the welfare of the nation. Indeed, in *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania [sic]* (1931), he wrote:

THE good Education of Youth ... as the surest Foundation of the Happiness both of private Families and of Common-wealths [sic] ... as might supply the succeeding Age with Men qualified to serve the Publick [sic] with Honour [sic] to themselves, and to their Country.

He once stated: "In quality of a citizen you are obliged to take care of the commonwealth" (Franklin 1809, 405). Commenting on Franklin, Cloyd (1902, 13) wrote: "His great ambition was to benefit mankind, and every moment that could be taken from his public service was spent in devising something to promote the general welfare." Mumford (2002, 261) remarked about Franklin's university: "What is perhaps most noteworthy about the founding of the university ... is ... Franklin's attention to the management of social interests." Wolf (2024) argued that Franklin's educational philosophy focused on community service. These arguments reveal that Franklin's view of educational governance is imbued with the spirit of utilitarianism. To a certain extent, it can be acknowledged that Franklin had practiced the principles of utilitarianism prior to their systematic articulation as a philosophical doctrine with prominent figures such as Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), and Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900). The communitarian spirit exemplified in Franklin's educational philosophy is closely aligned with core values found in the educational thought of many countries across the globe, among which are the Philippines and Vietnam. For example, the Filipino spirit of *pakikipagkapwa-tao* encourages a sense of responsibility toward the community, thereby fostering mutual aid in learning. Similarly, the Vietnamese spirit of "solidarity and mutual support in learning" contributes to the development of a community-oriented culture.

Franklin also espoused a pragmatic approach to school administration. He manifested this viewpoint through his proposal to establish a dual educational system consisting of two parallel types of schools: the English school and the Latin-Greek school. This was the result of a compromise between the school that Franklin believed would be better suited to his country (the English school) and the school supported by "the learned gentlemen whose subscriptions and countenance were needed in opening the school" (the Latin-Greek school) (Cloyd 1902, 31-2). Morgan (2005, 299) referred

to this as “Franklin’s pragmatism” – “a willingness not to insist on some abstract principle in transactions with other people, a willingness to make concessions.”

Although American pragmatism was formally codified decades after Franklin’s time, the moral and epistemological impulses that would later define the movement were already discernible in his thought. Franklin’s thought, grounded in civic responsibility and empirical reasoning, can be seen as providing not only a historical antecedent but also a philosophical foundation upon which later pragmatists would construct their systems. His educational philosophy, in particular, manifests “a nascent spirit of pragmatism”: knowledge acquires worth only insofar as it contributes to human betterment and serves communal flourishing.

According to Campbell (2009), there exists a vital intellectual link between Franklin and later pragmatic figures, including John Dewey (1859–1952) – “one of America’s foremost and most representative educators” (Hovre 1931, 101). Although Dewey did not directly cite Franklin, his educational philosophy reflects a transformation and extension of Franklin’s pragmatic legacy. Franklin regarded knowledge as an instrument for the improvement of human life – he founded the Junto Club as a forum for the free exchange of ideas, designed for mutual self-improvement among its members (Franklin 2012). Dewey, in turn, elevated this principle into a comprehensive philosophy of democratic education (Campbell 1995). From his perspective, learning is not the mere accumulation of knowledge, but an active participation in “the continuous reconstruction of experience” (Dewey 1916, 93). According to Ralston (2022, 66), both of them “offer valuable insight and assistance to the moral agent wanting to cultivate a good character.”

In *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania [sic]* (1931), Franklin articulated several humanistic perspectives regarding the responsibilities of educational administrators. According to Franklin, the school’s governing board should do the following: “*visit the Academy often, encourage and countenance the Youth, countenance and assist the Masters ... look on the Students [sic] as in some Sort their Children, treat them with Familiarity and Affection*” (Franklin 1931, 7). This vividly reflects the deeply humanistic orientation embedded in Franklin’s educational philosophy, particularly in his viewpoints on school administration.

Franklin may be regarded as one of the earliest architects of a model of educational autonomy that nevertheless required governmental supervision. Indeed, in the Western intellectual tradition, prior to Franklin, the English Enlightenment philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) had emphasized the concept of academic freedom – referred to as “natural freedom” – while not wholly repudiating the supervisory role of governmental authority. Nevertheless, the governmental intervention in the governance of educational institutions did not constitute the central focus of his educational philosophy (see Locke & Milton 1830). The French Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a contemporary of Franklin, also underscored the importance of freedom in education; however, he advanced the ideal of “perfect freedom” unencumbered by “civil bondage” (Rousseau 1894, 51). This implies that education ought to proceed autonomously, free from the intervention of civil authorities – a stance that stands in contrast to Franklin’s position, which endorsed governmental oversight in the governance of educational institutions. Accordingly, although both Franklin and Rousseau extolled the value of freedom in education, their

educational philosophies fundamentally diverged from each other. Franklin envisioned educational freedom primarily in terms of educational institutional autonomy – a societal factor. Rousseau's advocacy for "perfect freedom" reflected a more radical philosophical point of view: education ought to be entirely independent of civil structures, free from any external intervention, thereby prioritizing the natural aspect (the natural development of learners) over the artificial aspect (societal conditioning). Perhaps that was why "Immanuel Kant described him in 1755 as 'the Prometheus of modern times'" (Goodwin 2016, 64). Similarly, Lyons (2013) argued that Benjamin Franklin and his friends brought the Enlightenment to America. However, Franklin's conception of freedom diverged from that of the German Enlightenment of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). "The freedom he [Franklin] 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, 124).

Extending the previous argument, in Eastern educational traditions, although significant emphasis was placed on the development of learners, comparatively little attention was afforded to educational institutional autonomy, as Franklin championed. For instance, in the Chinese intellectual tradition, Confucian philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius did not explicitly emphasize this kind of autonomy as Franklin later would; instead, they extolled the authority of the teacher and upheld strictness as a fundamental principle in education.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S VIEWS ON CURRICULUM

Franklin championed a curriculum that was modern, universal, democratic, equitable, and practical. Franklin held a modern view on curriculum development, as he proposed a curriculum taught in English, a modern language, rather than in classical languages such as Latin and Greek. Cloyd (1902, 32) wrote: "that he had the modern point of view is attested by the many Manual Training, Industrial, and Technical Schools all over the land, that give no place to the classical languages." Additionally, the curriculum he proposed included subjects of a modern character, such as modern history.

Concerning the dimension of universality, Franklin advocated for instruction in English, the mother tongue, and a widely spoken language. Franklin's proposal to conduct instruction in English – a vernacular language – rather than in classical languages such as Latin and Greek signaled a shift toward greater accessibility. Wolf (2024) argued that Franklin championed universal access to education, including for women and African American slaves.

Regarding the democratic aspect, there is evidence suggesting that Franklin endorsed a democratic model of education. In *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania [sic]* (1931, 25), he wrote: "all should not be compell'd [sic] to learn Latin, Greek, or the modern foreign Languages; yet none that have an ardent desire to learn them should be refused." Accordingly, Franklin advocated for a curricular model that integrated elective and compulsory subjects, thereby reflecting his endorsement of democratic ideals in education – understood not as absolute

freedom, but as a form of democracy reconciled with the structural and regulatory imperatives of institutional governance.

Concerning the equitable aspect, Franklin's establishment of the Philadelphia public library provided unprecedented access to reading materials for the working-class populace in the colonial society of his time. Furthermore, his particular concern for the education of women, orphans, and African Americans contributes to extending educational opportunities to socially marginalized groups, thereby offering them a greater prospect for personal and intellectual advancement. "Franklin maintained a life-long interest in improving the opportunities and life chances of the middling sorts The Academy belonged to the line of Franklin's civic projects intended to provide easier access to education and knowledge for the sons of middling parents" (Koschnik 2011, 348). Franklin's approach to education markedly diverged from the prevailing philosophies of his contemporaries, such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson – "Other members of the revolutionary generation, such as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, believed in the existence of a natural aristocracy, but Franklin again and again returned to the egalitarian potential of a wide distribution of knowledge" (Koschnik 2011, 348). Moreover, he "personally arranged for the education of one of his African American slaves" (Wolf 2024, 359).

Regarding the practical aspect, in *A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge among the British Plantations in America* (1743) as well as *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania [sic]* (1931), Franklin advanced a series of educational propositions with a high degree of practical applicability. In the latter work, he wrote: "As to their STUDIES, it would be well if they could be taught every Thing that is useful ... It is therefore propos'd [sic] that they learn those Things that are likely to be most useful" (Franklin 1931, 11).

The curriculum outline presented in the *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania [sic]* (1931) emphasized not just reading, speaking, and writing, but also various practical subjects such as geography, commerce, mechanics, and others. In colonial America, "this curriculum, with its strong practical bent, was an innovation with far-reaching implications for higher education" (Mumford 2002, 261). He likewise highlighted the applicability of curricular content to real-world contexts. For example, he wrote: "History will also give occasion to expatiate on the Advantage of Civil Orders and Constitutions" (Franklin 1931, 22). According to Cloyd (1902, 34), "The kind of arithmetic he would have taught is what is termed today business, or commercial arithmetic – that kind that had directly in view the student's functioning in society ... His idea about geometry was of the same practical kind; it was needed by the astronomer, the surveyor, the mariner."

According to Cloyd (1902), Franklin recognized that the majority of people in the colonial society – most of whom belonged to the middle class – required a more practically oriented curriculum, rather than one heavily grounded in scholasticism. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that "Franklin identified problems based on practical need" (Mumford 2002, 253), and he consistently expected that learners, upon graduation, would be able to apply the knowledge acquired in school to meet the concrete demands of their workplaces (Cloyd 1902).

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

Franklin's perspectives on community-based education are most clearly reflected in his views on the Junto Club and the Library Company of Philadelphia.

The Junto Club: An Early Community-Based Education Framework

Founded in 1727 by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, the Junto Club was one of his earliest and most notable efforts to promote self-education, thereby advancing societal improvement in colonial America. Franklin, at merely twenty-one years old, envisioned the Junto as a forum wherein individuals of diverse trades and backgrounds could gather regularly to exchange ideas, foster collaborative and intellectual advancement for the public good. The Junto Club can be regarded as a pioneering model of a community education center in colonial America owing to its focus on self-education, public service, and knowledge dissemination. Indeed, members of the club were actively encouraged to pursue self-education through independent inquiry into topics concerning Ethics, Politics, and Natural Philosophy – he said: “every member, in his turn, should produce one or more queries on any point of Morals, Politics, or Natural Philosophy” (Franklin 2012, 51). In his autobiography, Franklin (2012, 52) remarked that the club was “the best school of philosophy, morality, and politics that then existed in the province” – schools, of course, function as public services dedicated to the widespread distribution of knowledge. Therefore, Franklin's perspective on community education is clearly reflected in the foundational principles and operational directives he instituted for this organization.

According to Franklin, a community learning center should serve as a pragmatic institution, wherein the application of practical and civic knowledge for the betterment of society is prioritized. Verily, “the Junto members were not just men of words, but deeds, when it came to furthering Franklin's ideas” (Palmieri, 2015). For instance, the issue of paper currency circulation was deliberated within the Junto Club – Franklin (2012, 55) said: “a cry among the people for more paper money ... We had discuss'd [sic] this point in our Junto.” The Junto functioned as an “incubation chamber” for ideas (see LeMay 2006), from which these ideas were subsequently disseminated to the wider public through publications. As Franklin (2012, 80) noted:

I considered my newspaper, also, as another means of communicating instruction, and in that view frequently reprinted in it extracts from the Spectator, and other moral writers; and sometimes publish'd [sic] little pieces of my own, which had been first compos'd [sic] for reading in our Junto.

A community education organization advocated by Franklin would be characterized by order and discipline. These principles were reflected in the regulations he established for his Junto Club, as evidenced by his (2012, 51) own words as follows:

Our debates were to be under the direction of a president, and to be conducted in the sincere spirit of inquiry after truth, without fondness for dispute, or desire of victory; and, to prevent warmth, all expressions of positiveness in opinions, or direct contradiction, were, after some time made contraband and prohibited under small pecuniary penalties.

In a passage of his autobiography, Franklin (2012, 76) wrote:

I made it a rule to forbear all direct contradiction to the sentiments of others, and all positive assertion of my own. I even forbid myself, agreeably to the old laws of our Junto, the use of every word or expression in the language that imported a fix'd [sic] opinion, such as certainly, undoubtedly, etc.

However, the aforementioned provisions merely addressed the prerequisites, not the decisive requirements. Franklin did not advocate for a rigidly formal atmosphere; rather, he built an educational environment characterized by academic freedom, wherein individuals were encouraged to freely express and engage in discussions on topics of personal interest. Specifically, Franklin's Junto Club emphasized academic freedom by allowing each member to pose questions and present essays on topics of their choice, rather than imposing predetermined subjects. He (2012, 51). articulated that: "every member ... should produce one or more queries ... and once in three months produce and read an essay of his own writing, on any subject he pleased." Furthermore, in Junto, "members recited silly poems, songs, played the flute drunkenly, and gave each other nicknames ... a Laugh, a Glass, and even a Song ..." (Palmieri, 2015).

Franklin's Junto Club represented an early model of a learning society. His intention for the Junto was to establish "a club of mutual improvement" (Franklin 2012, 51). "The importance of mutual aid was strongly emphasized in the rules governing the club" (Cloyd 1902, 23). However, his vision for this club transcended the mere personal advancement of its members. Through this model, he aimed to cultivate a society where citizens willingly engaged in self-directed learning for personal development, thereby contributing to the collective progress of society. Franklin's idea of constructing a hierarchical club network subtly embodied the notion of a "learning society" – a concept that would only be formally articulated in the twentieth century. In his autobiography, he (2012, 84) wrote: "Every member separately should endeavor to form a subordinate club, with the same rules respecting queries, etc., ... The advantages proposed were the improvement of so many more young citizens by the use of our institutions." Cloyd (1902, 23) discovered a profound philosophical principle that Franklin embedded in his miniature model of a learning society, articulated as follows: "a member in the club (more broadly, a citizen in society) – 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." This philosophy also reflects the harmonious integration of individualism and utilitarianism within Franklin's perspective on community-based education. While he underscored the intrinsic worth of each learner (manifested in his emphasis on self-directed learning, the spirit of academic freedom, among other qualities), he simultaneously oriented their educational endeavors toward serving the interests of the community and, more broadly, of society as a whole.

Through this approach, Franklin's microcosmic model of a learning society effectively blurred the boundaries between individual interests and collective welfare, offering a profound viewpoint on the social purposes of education.

Accordingly, while Franklin did not explicitly adopt the term "learning society" – a concept that would only crystallize in the twentieth century – he nonetheless implicitly laid the foundational groundwork for a societal model wherein education disseminates naturally through communal interaction.

Franklin's Junto Club can be regarded as a paradigmatic embodiment of Enlightenment ideals in microcosm. Functioning as an educational institution without formal walls, the Junto embodied Franklin's belief that "Enlightened knowledge ... exists independently of the 'schools,' independently, that is, of scholastic learning" (Campbell 2009, 78), situating learning beyond scholastic hierarchy and institutional constraint. In this voluntary organization, intellectual inquiry and moral deliberation were democratized: each member was equally entitled to articulate, critique, and refine ideas in pursuit of collective improvement. In this sense, the Junto enacted what Franklin's age conceived as "Enlightened reason," understood as "not only a critical but also a democratic faculty" (Campbell 2009, 78).

The Library Company of Philadelphia: An Early Community-Based Education Model

Motivated by the reading needs of the members of the Junto Club – an organization that can be regarded as an early center of community-based education – Benjamin Franklin and his fellow members of the club established a public library in 1731, later known as The Library Company of Philadelphia. This library stands as one of the earliest and most influential public libraries in American history. It can be viewed as a community-based educational institution, as it provides significant support for self-directed learning through reading among individuals from all segments of society. Indeed, in his autobiography, Franklin (2012, 59) referred to The Library Company of Philadelphia as his "first project of a public nature." Distinct from many contemporary libraries, the selection of books in Franklin's library was curated to meet the reading needs of the broader public rather than to serve the interests of any particular individual or group (see The Library Company of Philadelphia 2015). Thus, Franklin's views on community-based education can be explored through his perspectives on the establishment of this public library.

According to Franklin, for a community-based educational center to survive and thrive, it must cultivate a spirit of mutual sharing and close collaboration among its members. This perspective is reflected in his idea of a "contributory library," where members collectively donated books to form a shared collection. He recounted this in his autobiography, stating that: "by thus clubbing our books to a common library, we should, while we lik'd [sic] to keep them together, have each of us the advantage of using the books of all the other members" (Franklin 2012, 59).

He endorsed the development of a community-centered educational institution aligned with the principles of utilitarianism, prioritizing the maximization of collective benefit through education. This is evidenced in the following remarks articulated by him: "by thus clubbing our books ... 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, 59), or “finding the advantage of this little collection, I propos’d [sic] to render the benefit from books more common, by commencing a public subscription library” (Franklin 2012, 65).

Franklin envisioned that the functioning of a community-centered learning organization ought to develop pragmatically. Indeed, his initial proposal for the Philadelphia Library – a “clubbing library” – soon revealed its inefficacy when confronted with practical realities. In response, he promptly shifted toward a “lending library” initiative. This strategic adaptation enabled Franklin’s public library initiative to sustain itself and flourish over time, preserving its legacy into the present day.

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY VIETNAMESE EDUCATION FROM BENJAMIN FRANKLIN’S EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Vietnam’s education system is currently undergoing a fundamental and comprehensive innovation. One of the stated policy orientations is to “seek international cooperation in education development to meet the requirements for international integration” (Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, sec. B, pt. I, item 7). Accordingly, the selective incorporation of progressive elements of American educational philosophy – as exemplified in Franklin’s educational viewpoints – within a framework consistent with Vietnam’s legal provisions on education is both contextually appropriate and essential for advancing the national education system.

In the context of international educational integration, progressive pedagogical philosophies from around the world have increasingly attracted scholarly and practical attention in Vietnam. Among them, Benjamin Franklin’s educational thought – rooted in Enlightenment rationality – has gradually been introduced to Vietnamese educators, philosophers, scholars, students, among others, primarily through recent Vietnamese translations of his works. Notable examples include: *Nhà khoa học đa tài với phát minh chế ngự được tia sét* (A Versatile Scientist whose Invention Tamed Lightning) (Tiểu Vũ 2025), *Tự truyện Benjamin Franklin (Từ 1706 đến 1757)* (The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (1706–1757)) (Thụy Khánh Chương Trans., 2023), *Tuyển tập các câu châm ngôn và thành ngữ, và một bản phác họa ngắn về cuộc đời của Benjamin Franklin – Poor Richard’s Almanack* (A Collection of Proverbs and Sayings, and a Short Sketch of the Life of Benjamin Franklin – Poor Richard’s Almanack) (Thái Phạm & Thu An Trans, 2024), among others.

Fostering Institutional Autonomy within the Framework of State Educational Governance

In recent years, the issue of school autonomy has emerged as a focal point of educational discourse in Vietnam, reflecting efforts of educational reform aimed at enhancing institutional efficiency and quality. Vietnam’s contemporary education system has attained substantial achievements, particularly in the field of educational

management. For instance, “mechanisms for autonomous administration ... in education and training have been institutionalized and yielded initial results” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, 20–1). Despite these achievements, notable deficiencies persist, particularly with respect to the realization and implementation of educational autonomy. For example, the perception of autonomy in some institutions, along with the managerial and executive competencies of certain administrators, is still inadequate (Educational Communication Center n.d.). Accordingly, the party and the state have proactively promulgated a series of policies designed to foster educational autonomy across all institutional levels, such as the policy advocating for enhancing “autonomy and responsibility of educational institutions” (Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, sec. B, pt. III, item 5).

Applying Franklin’s perspectives on autonomy in school administration to the contemporary Vietnamese educational context necessitates heightened attention to ensuring a harmonious balance between the public and private spheres. Franklin referred to the factor “state control” in his discussions on school autonomy in a nation that emphasizes the principle of “democratic decentralism” (National Archives n.d.). Meanwhile, in the context of fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education, contemporary Vietnamese legislators advocate for greater institutional autonomy within the educational sector – “enhance autonomy and responsibility of educational institutions ... enhance decentralization, raise the sense of responsibility; encourage the independence and creativity of educational institutions” (Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, sec. B, pt. III, item 5). – in a country governed according to the principle of “democratic centralism” (see The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2013, Chapter 1, Article 8.1). This reflects the importance of cultivating a balanced and harmonious relationship between school autonomy and state oversight – a central aspiration of Franklin, a distinguished legislator and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, as well as a guiding objective pursued by contemporary Vietnamese legislators. This issue holds substantial significance for the operationalization of the current autonomy mechanism within Vietnam’s contemporary education system, particularly in a context where the “State management and education administration in educational institutions are not noticeably separated” (Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, sec. A, item 3).

The core of Franklin’s educational philosophy lies in the principle of “shared governance,” in which authority is distributed among stakeholders through collaboration, transparency, and mutual accountability. Such a distribution of power between the state and educational institutions requires not only the responsibility of the state but also that of educational institutions themselves. In Vietnam, the current mechanism of educational autonomy is defined as “a mechanism of autonomy linked with accountability of education and training units” (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021, 116). Accordingly, the state is expected to effectively fulfill its supportive role vis-à-vis educational institutions; in return, these institutions are obligated to demonstrate accountability in a transparent and verifiable manner, thereby establishing the trust and foundation necessary for the state to delegate greater autonomy to them. In addition, to ensure the effective implementation of the aforementioned coordination of responsibilities, it is essential to maintain and enhance regular meetings as well as

consultations and dialogues between the state and educational institutions concerning relevant issues. This assumes critical significance in the operationalization of institutional autonomy within Vietnam's contemporary education system, particularly in the context of expanding accountability frameworks and increasing decentralization of educational governance.

Additionally, the strategic interrelation between institutional autonomy and state control constitutes a foundational mechanism for preserving and promoting the public good, thereby contributing to broader societal advancement. In alignment with this commitment to the public good, the Communist Party and the State have enacted targeted policies and institutional mechanisms aimed at safeguarding cadres and Party members who are willing to confront adversity in order to take bold and decisive action in the service of the common interest (see Communist Party of Vietnam 2021).

Enhancing Democracy, Universality, Modernity, Equity, and Practical Applicability in Curriculum Design

Vietnam's education system has been oriented toward a developmental trajectory grounded in the principles of democracy, universality, modernity, equity, and practical applicability. According to the Resolution on "Fundamental and Comprehensive Innovation in Education, Serving Industrialization and Modernization in a Socialist-Oriented Market Economy" (2013), the Vietnamese education sector is encouraged to promote "democracy and private sector involvement in education" (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, sec. B, pt. I, Item 6). The Education Law of Vietnam (2019) stipulates that the national education system shall be characterized by universality and modernity (see Chapter 1, Article 3.1). According to this Law, "The State shall ensure social equality in education" (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2019, Chapter 1, Article 13.2). In addition, one of the overall targets of Vietnam's education system is to "develop an open education system that is practical" (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, sec. B, pt. II, Item 1). This necessitates that "educational activities must be conducted on the principles of learning coupled with practice, theories connected to practicability" (The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2019, Chapter 1, Article 3.2).

However, the aforementioned positive elements have yet to fully realize their intended potential. For instance, "the education system ... is rather theoretical than practical ... The method of education, testing, and assessment are still obsolete" (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, Section A, Item 2). Therefore, the application of Franklin's educational perspectives to enhance modernity, universality, democracy, equity, and practical applicability in curriculum design is both meaningful and relevant.

On Advancing Modernity and Practical Applicability in the Curriculum

Franklin's perspective on a modern curriculum is discernible through his advocacy for designing an educational program that corresponded closely to the practical demands of contemporary society (see Cloyd 1902). This demonstrates that

practicality and modernity are inextricably linked dimensions, both of which must be simultaneously addressed as integral components in the formulation and evolution of curricular frameworks. Accordingly, the application of Franklin's educational philosophy necessitates that Vietnamese educators construct curricula that are closely aligned with the concrete demands and evolving dynamics of societal practice. Amid the current momentum of international integration and internationalization of Vietnamese education, the disparity between domestic practical trajectories and global advancements necessitates timely and contextually calibrated curricular revisions. Such adaptations are essential to safeguard the modernity of national educational programs. Absent these reforms, there exists a tangible risk that the curricular structures may become obsolete or misaligned with the demands of a knowledge-based economy, exerting a detrimental impact on the development of national education. Thus, curriculum reform necessitates the cultivation of a nuanced equilibrium between localized cultural responsiveness and global adaptability. Inferred from Franklin's educational viewpoint – he consistently maintained the expectation that graduates should be equipped to effectively translate the knowledge and skills acquired in school into practical competencies that align with the requirements of their future professional environments (see Cloyd 1902) – ensuring curricular practicality necessitates that educational programs be designed in accordance with the concrete occupational demands students are likely to face upon graduation (see Cloyd 1902). In order to realize this goal, Franklin contended that particular emphasis must be placed on the applicability of each subject area, ensuring that the knowledge imparted within the classroom is directly transferable to real-world contexts. The prioritization of this essential characteristic should be regarded as a central concern in deliberations among curriculum designers, as it profoundly determines the relevance, pedagogical efficacy, and societal responsiveness of curricula.

On Enhancing Universality, Democracy, and Equity in the Curriculum

With respect to universality, drawing upon Franklin's universalist educational philosophy, curricula should be designed to serve all social strata, rather than being tailored exclusively for an academically elite minority. In the context of contemporary Vietnamese education, this necessitates deliberate efforts to broaden educational accessibility for learners from rural areas, ethnic minority communities, and the informal labor sector.

In relation to democracy, Franklin's Junto model of education embodies his philosophy of "peer dialogue and open discussion," offering valuable insights for educational systems worldwide – including that of Vietnam – on the development of democratic curricular frameworks. Moreover, it anticipates a now-widespread pedagogical orientation: the learner-centered approach, which emphasizes active participation, autonomy, and the co-construction of knowledge. In Vietnam, within the context of nationwide educational reform, the Resolution entitled "Fundamental and Comprehensive Innovation in Education, Serving Industrialization and Modernization in a Socialist-Oriented Market Economy" (2013) explicitly identifies the encouragement of "democracy and private sector involvement in education" as one of its core strategic viewpoints. The "Education Development Strategy by 2030,

Orientation toward 2045” states that “education and training are for people and their happiness, maximizing human factors, considering humans as the center” (Prime Minister of Vietnam 2024, Article 1, Part I, Item 3).

In terms of equity, Franklin’s educational philosophy articulates his opposition to the elitist model of education that predominated colonial society, and affirms his conviction that education ought to be universally accessible, irrespective of social class or origin. The public library established by Franklin, which intentionally extended access to working-class individuals, craftsmen, and common citizens, stands as one of the most compelling pieces of evidence of his commitment to epistemic equality – the belief that all individuals, regardless of their social origins, possess an inherent right to access knowledge. Accordingly, within the context of Vietnam’s ongoing educational reform, it is equally imperative to mitigate structural stratification across various models of schooling – such as the divide between public and private institutions, or between urban centers and remote, underserved regions. This not only echoes Franklin’s egalitarian vision of knowledge accessibility but also reinforces the ethical imperative to design an inclusive educational system wherein no learner is disadvantaged by their geographical or socioeconomic background.

Developing the community-based education system as an effective instrument for constructing a learning society

The operational effectiveness of the two community-based educational models founded by Franklin – the Junto Club and the Philadelphia Library Company – is incontrovertible. The discussions held within Franklin’s Junto Club served as a catalyst for the establishment of numerous Philadelphia institutions – most notably the American Philosophical Society and the Library Company of Philadelphia – to such an extent that the club has been regarded as an “incubation chamber for improvements” (Palmieri, 2015). The institutional model established by the Philadelphia Library Company laid the foundation for a broader library system whose influence significantly contributed to the intellectual, cultural, and civic development of society. Franklin (2012, 66) wrote: “reading became fashionable; and our people, having no publick [sic] amusements to divert their attention from study, became better acquainted with books, and in a few years were observ’d [sic] by strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than people of the same rank generally are in other countries.” Accordingly, it becomes evident that Franklin’s intellectual legacy is not merely of historical inspiration but also holds significant potential to offer viable implications for the advancement of educational systems globally, including that of Vietnam. Especially, amid Vietnam’s current wave of comprehensive educational reform, the Resolution on “Fundamental and Comprehensive Innovation in Education, Serving Industrialization and Modernization in a Socialist-Oriented Market Economy” (2013) identifies “developing an educational society” (The Central Steering Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2013, sec. B, pt. II, Item 1) as one of the overall targets of the national education system.

Both the Junto Club and the Library Company of Philadelphia – originally established to serve all segments of society with a genuine desire to learn – embody Franklin’s profound conviction in the human potential for autonomous and lifelong

learning. This process, which transcends the institutional boundaries of formal education, serves as a foundational pillar in the conceptual framework of a learning society. Within the framework of contemporary Vietnamese education, these two institutional models offer valuable implications for the development of a more inclusive and cohesive educational system, thereby contributing to constructing a learning society. First and foremost, the spirit of egalitarian interaction embodied in the Junto Club suggests the potential for constructing community-based learning environments – such as academic clubs and discussion forums – where learners engage in knowledge construction through mutual and equal interaction rather than passive reception. Particularly in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution – an age in which socio-economic and educational activities are predominantly shifting from physical to digital domains – the construction and expansion of open online learning environments has become an urgent imperative that must be undertaken without delay. Franklin's public library initiative – originally designed to meet the reading needs of the working-class majority and to expand their access to useful knowledge – offers an instructive precedent for reimagining the role of libraries in Vietnam. Rather than functioning merely as static repositories of books, libraries should be transformed into dynamic community-based learning centers that foster continuous education, knowledge exchange, and civic engagement.

CONCLUSION

Benjamin Franklin's educational philosophy reveals a profound and pragmatic vision of education. His educational endeavor was notably multifaceted, encompassing critical reflections on school administration, curricular development, and community-based education. First, his perspectives on school governance underscored the importance of institutional autonomy within the broader framework of the State's regulatory authority over education. Second, his curricular views emphasized the significance of modernity, universality, democracy, equity, and practical applicability. In this regard, Franklin sought to align education with the practical needs of society rather than with classical elitism. Lastly, his viewpoints on community-based education found tangible expression in initiatives like the Junto Club and the Library Company of Philadelphia. These institutions served as early prototypes of open learning and autonomous self-education. Together, these three dimensions of Franklin's thought constitute a coherent and forward-looking educational endeavor that continues to inspire contemporary discourse on educational reform. The unifying thread that interweaves these three dimensions is Franklin's enduring commitment to the public good – a conviction that education ought to serve not merely the interests of the privileged few, but the broader aspirations and developmental needs of society as a whole.

The relevance of Benjamin Franklin's educational endeavor to contemporary Vietnamese educational reform is not only compelling in its philosophical foundation but also timely in addressing present-day challenges in policy and practice. First, Franklin's advocacy for institutional autonomy resonates with contemporary efforts in Vietnam to decentralize educational governance, empowering institutions to exercise

greater decision-making capacity in administration. Second, his emphasis on modernity, universality, democracy, equity, and practical applicability in curriculum development aligns closely with Vietnam's recent attempts to reform curricular frameworks in line with labor market demands. Finally, his vision of community-based education – epitomized by the Junto Club and the Library Company of Philadelphia – provides a robust conceptual foundation for advancing the development of a learning society in Vietnam. Taken together, these insights provide valuable philosophical guidance for Vietnam's ongoing efforts to develop an inclusive, adaptable, and forward-looking educational system.

NOTE

1. This paper is conceptually related to a previously published article entitled “*Thought of Benjamin Franklin on Education and Lessons Learned towards Education in Vietnam*”, co-authored by the present author and Nguyen Anh Thuong, and published in the *European Journal of Education Studies* (Vol. 12, Issue 11, 2025). The earlier article examined Franklin's educational thought in relation to the educational forms and domains, as well as the lessons drawn from these aspects for Vietnamese education. The present paper, however, differs in both focus and scope: it offers a philosophical analysis of Franklin's views on school administration, curriculum, and community-based education, as well as certain implications for contemporary Vietnamese education. Therefore, while both works engage Franklin's philosophy of education, the current study advances a distinct and deeper line of philosophical inquiry into the subject.

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