



The Innovation of the Geography Education Curriculum in Vietnam

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to point out the significant improvements of the Geography Education Curriculum 2018 compared to the 2006 ones in Vietnam. The research result is the analysis of Geography Education Curriculum improvements with scientific bases to explain them. To achieve this goal, theoretical research and practical experience summarization are the main used methods. Research results contribute to the training and retraining Geography teachers to meet the requirements of Vietnamese Geography Education innovation. Besides, it directs the improvement of training Geography teacher-student curriculum.

Keywords

Geography Education Curriculum, Geography teachers, Geography Competencies, Geography Education Competencies

INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, since December 28, 2018, the General Education Curriculum has just been renewed after 15 years-period application to suit the practical requirements. Accordingly, the Geography Education Curriculum also changes in K-12 education. It is a landmark and comprehensive improvement in all areas, including the development of education curriculum viewpoint, goals and content of Geography Education Curriculum, the orientation of education methods and evaluation. The key improvements compared to the Current Curriculum are: 1) Schools Geography Education Curriculum 2018 is designed to the orientation of developing learners' competencies and qualities instead of the Current content-oriented Curriculum. The Geography competencies for students are well defined. 2) The contents of Geography are streamlined and updated to suit the modern geography development. 3) The New Geography Curriculum focuses on experiential learning and assessment for the learner's progress. 4) One Geography Education Curriculum is applied in the whole

country but many textbooks will be acceptable, and, the curriculum operation will change to suit the actual local conditions. This approach has not appeared in the Current Curriculum.

This article provides a complete, systematic and comprehensive picture of the improvements in the Geography Education Curriculum in Vietnam. Based on that, the author proposes solutions for training Geography teacher students at universities and retraining high school Geography teachers to meet the requirements for the New Geography Curriculum.

1. The renovation of the General Education Curriculum in Vietnam since 2018

2018 General Education Curriculum will replace the previous ones applied from 2006. The current General Education Curriculum has completed its mission with remarkable educational achievements. However, it is necessary to be replaced with a more modern education curriculum to catch up with world development, especially, to supply the quality of human resources requirements. Besides, the developing trend of education curriculum and textbooks changes very quickly in the world; There are many new educational achievements that need to be promptly added to the national education curriculum. In the early 21st century, the changes in education have moved from emphasizing educational content to the development of learners' competencies Curriculum.

The designing approach of the 2018 General Education and the Geography Education Curriculum is completely different from 2006 (Hung 2019).

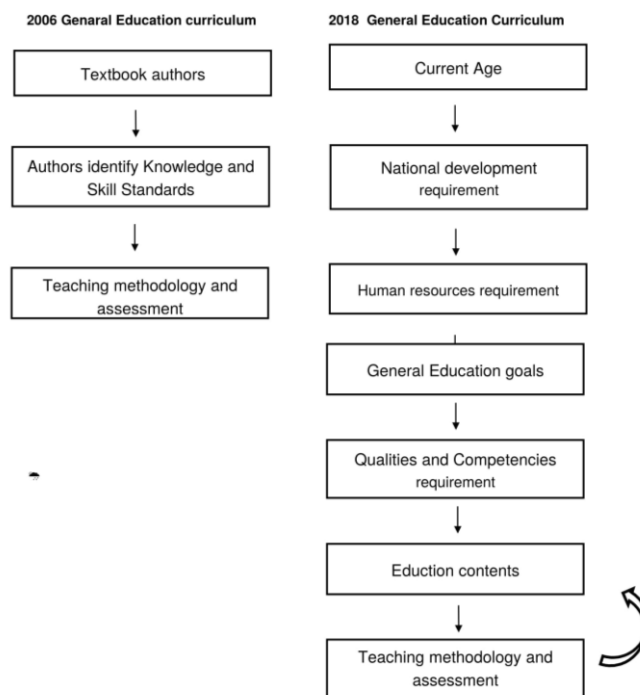


Figure 1. The designing approach of 2006 General Education Curriculum and 2018 (Source: Thuyet, Nguyen Minh; Hung, Bui Manh)

General Education Curriculum 2018 develops learners' qualities and competencies including 5 qualities and 10 competencies (MOET 2018a) (figure 2).



Figure 2. 5 qualities and 10 competencies in Vietnam General Education Curriculum 2018 (Source: Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training Vietnam News Agency)

Changing approaches in designing the education curriculum will govern all stages of the education process such as content, methods, facilities, organizational forms, testing, and evaluation. It aims to create a fundamental change in the quality of all subjects and education activities.

2. General Geography Education Curriculum 2018

Geography is a compulsory subject from grade 4 to grade 12 in Vietnam's General Education Curriculum. The current Geographic Education Curriculum that applied since 2006 was replaced by the 2018 Education Curriculum. The outstanding improvements are indicated in the following table:

Tab 1. Outstanding improvements in Geography Education Curriculum 2018 compared to 2006

Geography Education Curriculum 2006	Geography Education Curriculum 2018
content-oriented design	competencies oriented design
Geography teaching	Geography Education
not clearly indicate integration and career orientation	Deep integration from lower levels to higher levels
A unique set of textbooks	many sets of textbooks

The first, The concept of teaching Geography translates into Geography Education in General Geography Education Curriculum.

In Vietnam, when searching for research on Geography Education with the keyword "Geography teaching and learning", the results are extremely rich, but the keyword "Geography Education" is rare. The geography educator previously thought that School Geography was a field of teaching and learning. The concept of Geography Education was established in the 2018 Curriculum to create a broader concept of Geography teaching as well as an approach to the conception of countries around the world and the International Charter on Geography Education. In this study, the author explains Geography Education through the concepts of Sarah Bednarz and Rod Gerber.

Rod Gerber (1996) stated that "The way people learned about these different approaches to geography, developed the skills to conduct geographical investigations, embraced the values associated with these approaches, and practiced them in their lives became known as geographical education. "Geography in the school curriculum involves the education of young people about, in and for the environment and society in which they live." Geography becomes the medium for education. It contributes to education through: 1) knowledge with understanding about people and environments anywhere in the world; 2) fieldwork enabling learning in the community and in the local environment, and; 3) learning for the society and for environments that the people live in"(Rod Gerber n.d.).

According to Sarah Bednarz (2010), Geography education research is where research in geography and in education overlap (Figure 3). Imagine geography and education as rotating overlapping discs, the overlap may occur anywhere within the research topics that both academic areas pursue. If the overlap occurs between learning theory and geography, research will address fundamental questions such as, 'What is geographic learning? What is the nature of geographic knowledge? What skills enhance geographic learning?' If the overlap occurs between learning theory and one of the systematic specialties of geography, research will focus more narrowly on questions such as, 'How do high school students learn to think about human-environment relationships?' (Gerber, 1996). If geography intersects with education's teacher preparation domain, research may explore how teachers gain specific kinds of subject knowledge (Bednarz 2000)

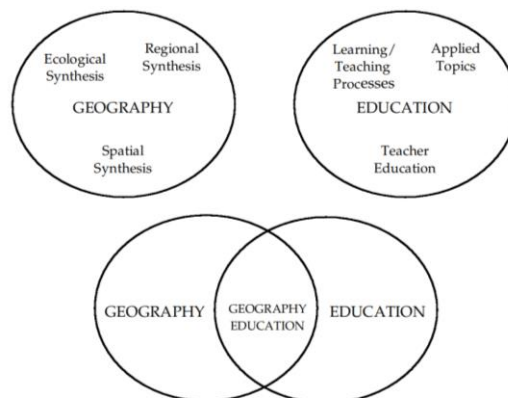


Figure 3. Geography Education defined as the overlap between Geography and Education. (Source: Bednarz, 2000)

To summarise, Geography Education is a way in which Geography educators guide learners to understand different approaches to Geography, develop geographic discovery skills, embrace interrelated values and regarding these methods and practice them in their lives. Geography becomes a means of education.

The second, Geography Education Curriculum 2018 is designed to develop learners' competencies

Geography Education Curriculum 2006 is content-based instruction The target of Geography knowledge, skills, and attitude was indicated in the Knowledge and Skills Standards and textbooks. By contrast, Geography Education Curriculum 2018 is built on the viewpoint of developing learners' competencies. This is reflected in the curriculum design view, objectives, requirements and content, educational methods and evaluation. In detail, “Geography Education Curriculum clearly identifies the qualities and competencies that can be formed and developed by this subject” (MOET, 2018b, p.3). “Geography Education Curriculum supports students form and develop Geography competencies - an expression of scientific competencies. At the same time, it develops students' major qualities and general competencies along with other academic subjects and Education activities” (MOET, 2018b, p.5) “Geography subject contributes to the formation and development for students’ major qualities and general competencies at levels appropriate and the subject in the General Education Curriculum”(MOET, 2018b, p.5). Geography competencies in Geography Education Curriculum include: *Knowledge of Geography* (Perception of the world in spatial perspective, Explanation of geographical phenomena and processes (natural, socio-economic)); *Inquiring Geography* (Use of geographical tools, Field studies, Use of the Internet in Geography study); *Applying Geography knowledge and skills learned* (Updating information, relating to the life, Fulfilling projects to explore the locality, Applying Geography knowledge to solve practical problems) (MOET, 2018b, p.5-7) (Figure 4)

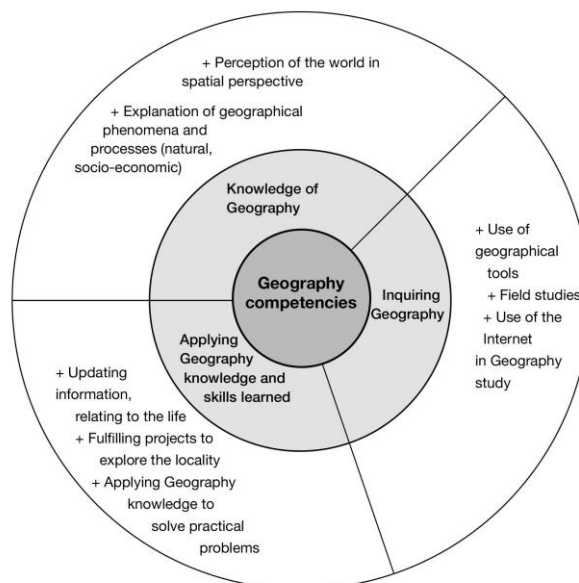


Figure 4: Geography competencies for students in Geography Education 2018 (source: Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training)

What is the basis for establishing a specific Geography competency framework? Nguyen Viet Thinh is one of the authors of the Geography Education Curriculum, in the study "Identifying specific Geography competencies and assess students' ability to achieve in new Education Curriculum"(2019) explained this. The authors based on the study of the Geography Curriculum of England, the National Geography Standard of the United States, the Geography Education of Germany, and inheriting the current Vietnamese Geography Education Curriculum (2006) to determine:

- Geography Competencies are specific competencies of Geography, which are also the foundation for Geography Education in the schools.
- Geography Standards (requirements) are determined for each level of education. It is based on the students' identified competencies and the development of knowledge, skills, the psychology of students (D. D. T. M. Thinh Nguyen Viet 2018)

The third, Geography Education content is improved following the direction of integration, practical and modern.

The concept of designing Geography Educational Content Direction is deeply integrated at lower education levels and gradually divided at higher. Specifically, at primary school level, History & Geography subject is taught in grades 4 and 5. Geography and History contents are integrated into local, national, regions and the world topics. Secondary school is also History & Geography subject but separated into 2 independent content. Integration education takes place in some join topics, for example, "The Geography Discoveries". Geography is an independent subject at high school and is a choice subject (subjects that students have the right to choose to study or not). The designing purpose is to ensure adequate provision of basic Geography knowledge and skills for students on the basis of Education Stage. Besides, it guides the career fields related to Geography at high school.

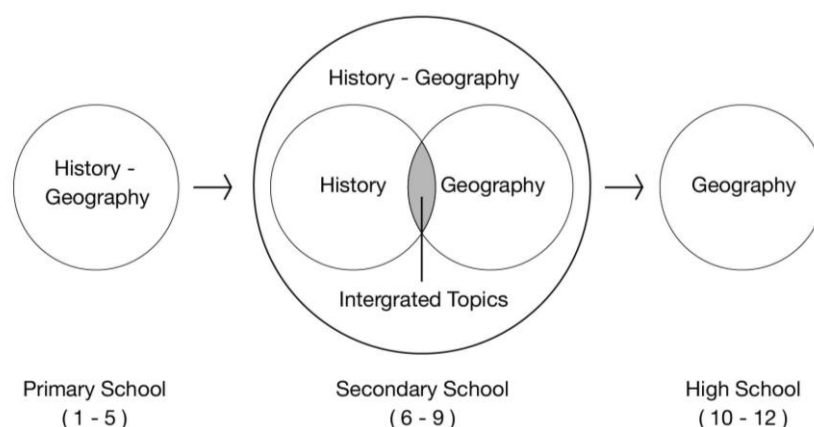


Figure 5. Deep integration at lower and gradual differentiation at higher education levels (source: Authors)

2006 Geography Education Curriculum does not clearly indicate to the integration. Geography is an independent subject or content from primary to high school. It is a compulsory subject at all three education levels. While the 2018 curriculum is designed in an integrated and segmented methodology, the 2006 Geography Education Curriculum is a "Spiral model" (Figure 6). It ensures the system - structure of Geography when Geography knowledge and skills are

developed from basic to advance in a stable structure. However, learners must follow all 3 Education levels to complete General Geography knowledge while the 2018 Curriculum stops at secondary school. As a result, career orientation is limited and Geography Education Curriculum becoming unnecessarily cumbersome. Moreover, this model is not really compatible with normative development because Geography is researched separately.

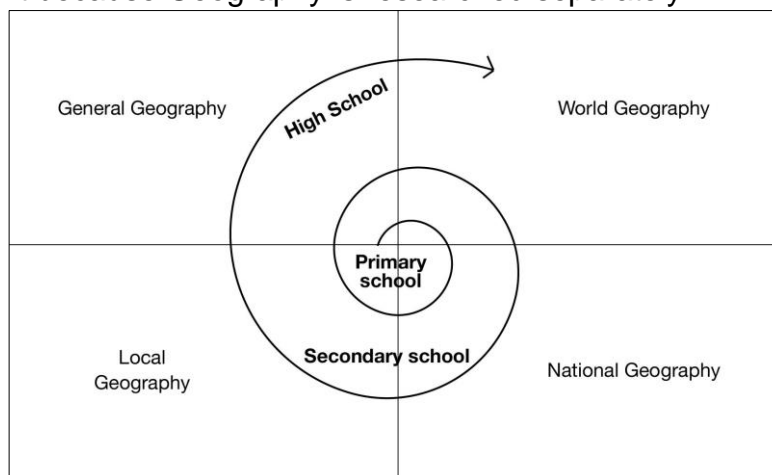


Figure 6. "Spiral model" in 2006 Geography Education Design

(Source: authors)

Geography Educational Content has not changed too much comparing to the 2006 curriculum. However, it has been improved, updated and redesigned accordingly. The curriculum ensures the systematic - structural and characteristics of Geography. Content options and implementations clearly show the structure of Geography, from general geography to world, national and local geography. However, it is not done in a linear manner, but according to the normative development of Geography and students' perceptions.

Students start with Geography through the lessons of local Geography where they are living, then the region, the country and finally the world. This approach makes Geography knowledge more accessible to elementary students. Moreover, it also emphasizes the experience. At secondary school, Geography knowledge began to be taught systematically, from general Geography & map to world, regional and national Geography. This content structure is reproduced but not repeated but more advanced for career orientation goals in high school. Thus, the implementation is still "spiral model" but deference content layout (Tab 2 & Figure 7)

Tab 2. 2018 Geography Education content structure from primary school to high school (MOET 2006)

Geography Education contents	Basis	Advanced
General Geography - Map - Physical Geography - Socio-economic Geography	Grade 2&3 (integrated into Nature and Society subject) - Grade 6	- Grade 10
World Geography - Continents: nature and people - Issues of the world and regions	- Grade 4 - Grade 7	- Grade 11

Nation Geography - Physical Geography - Socio-economic Geography - Geography division of territories	- Grade 4&5 - Grade 8&9	- Grade 12
Local Geography - Nature, People Culture,...where students live	- Grade 14	- Grade 12

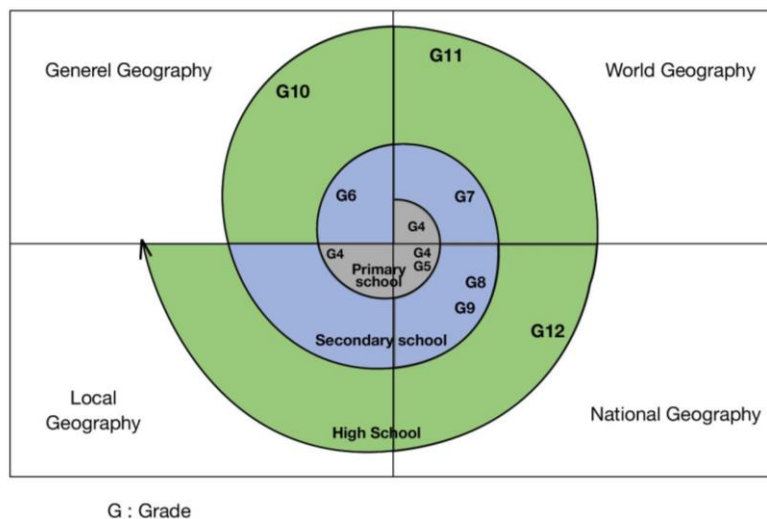


Figure 7. 2018 Geography education content structure from primary school to high school (Source: authors)

Integrated topics at secondary school are integrated Geography and History knowledge. The purpose is to guide students applying Geography and History knowledge and skills provided in individual blocks to solve complex learning and practical problems. Therefore, it may build integrated thinking and problem-solving competencies for students. These topics are highly integrated when solving learning content requires learners to apply the combined knowledge of many fields rather than just Geography, for example, The fourth Industrial revolution, disaster and prevention measures.

Tab 3. Geography Education contents in the Geography Education Curriculum 2018 (from grade 4 to 12) (MOET 2018b)

Geography contents / Integrated topics	Primary School		Secondary School				High School		
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Geography Learning facilities	x								
Students' local Geography	x								
The North Mountain region of Vietnam	x								
The Central Coast region of Vietnam	x								
The Highlands region of Vietnam	x								
The South region of Vietnam	x								
Vietnam country and people		x							
The first countries on the territory of Vietnam		x							
Building and defending our country		x							
The Neighboring countries		x							
Exploring the world		x							
Building our world		x							
Why study Geography			x						
Map			x						

The Earth			x						
Climate and climate change			x						
Water on the Earth			x						
Soil and creature on the Earth			x						
People and nature			x						
Europe				x					
Asia				x					
Africa				x					
Americas				x					
Australia				x					
Antarctica				x					
Vietnam: Location and territory					x				
Vietnam: Topography and minerals					x				
Vietnam: climate and rivers					x				
Vietnam: Creatures and soil					x				
Vietnam: Sea, island, and archipelago					x				
Vietnam: People						x			
Vietnam: Economic sectors Geography						x			
Vietnam: Geography division						x			
Physical Geography: Earth, lithosphere, Atmosphere, Hydrography, Biosphere							x		
Socio-Economic Geography: People, economic development resources, Economic Sectors Geography, Sustainable Development, and Green Growth								x	
Integrated Topics: Climate change, Urbanization, Writing Geography reports							x		
Socio-economic issues in the world: Differences in the level of socio-economic development of countries groups; Globalization, regionalization, Knowledge economy									x
Regions and countries in the world: Latin America; European Union (EU); Southeast Asia; Southwest Asia region; The United State; Russia; Japan; China Australia, South Africa									x
Integrated Topics: The issues of Southeast Asia; World tourism; Fourth Industrial Revolution (4.0)									x
Vietnam: Physical Geography									x
Vietnam: Residential Geography									x
Vietnam: Economic sectors Geography									x
Vietnam: Economic regions Geography									x
Vietnam: Exploring local Geography									x
Integrated Topics: Natural disasters and preventive measures; Regional Development; Craft village development									x

The fourth, one curriculum with many sets of Geography textbooks. There was only one Geography textbooks available to students in the whole country and educating Geography operates around that. It creates many disadvantages such as non-local features, lack of diversity, stereotypes. Therefore, the General Education Curriculum 2018 and Geography Education Curriculum only provide the content frame and requirements. Publishers, Education Universities, and Education departments will participate in the compilation of

various Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training provides textbook orientation with the strict requirements

3. Training and retraining Geography teachers

3.1. Geography Education competencies

Geography teachers are currently implementing the 2006 Geography Education Curriculum. Changing Curriculum is required a refreshing course for them. In addition, training curriculum for Geography student- teachers in the Education university also needs improvements to catch up and support General Education curriculum renovation.

Compatibility between Geography Education Curriculum, Training Geography student-teachers Curriculum and Retraining Geography teacher are necessary (figure 8). Geography Education Curriculum develops students with specific Geography capabilities. Respectively, training and retraining the Geography teacher curriculum must also follow the Teaching Profession's Competencies, and Geography teacher is Geography Education competencies.

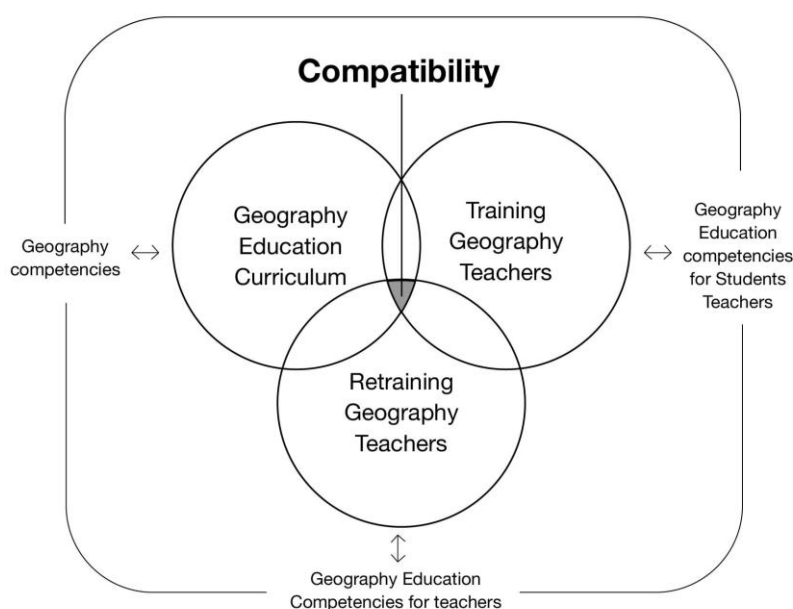


Figure 8. The relationship between developing Geography competencies and training & retraining Geography teachers (Source: authors)

“**Geography Education Competency** is defined as the ability that a teacher identifies and implements specific strategies, processes and measures to formulate and develop Geography Competencies for their students on the basis of subject curriculum requirements, learners' cognitive characteristics and behavior and diverse learning situations”(T. H. Van Thinh Nguyen Viet 2019)

Geography Education Competency is composed of components including Geography-specific competency, Applying education knowledge into Geography Education in high school and Supportive Competency. The components are divided into those elements where the specific expression competencies and Geography Competency is the main basis. Geography Education Competency is a "dynamic system" because it is always influenced by external factors such as socio-economic development, technological

revolution, the renovation of the General Education Curriculum. That means Geography teachers must improve their competency to meet the changing practical requirements (Figure 9) (T. H. Van Thinh Nguyen Viet 2019)

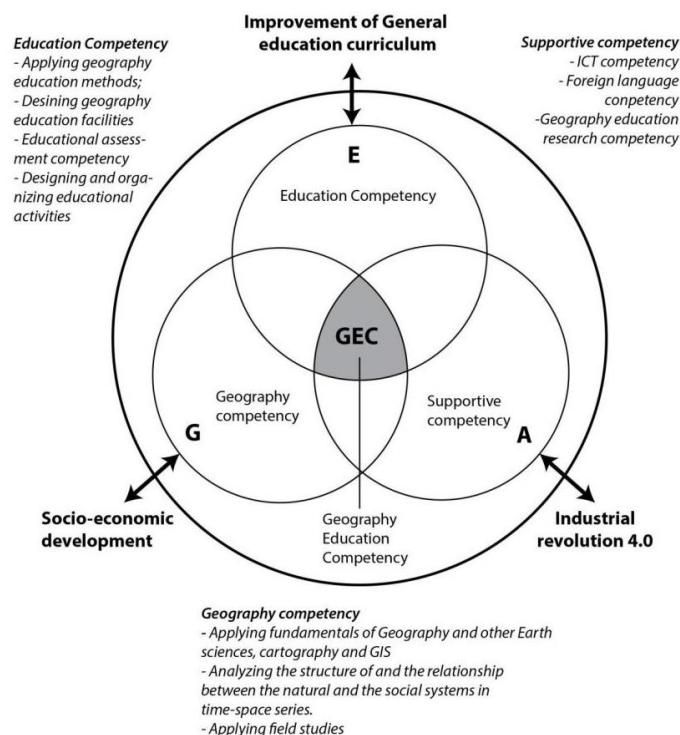


Figure 9. Structure of the Geography Education Competency

(Source: Nguyen, Ha, 2019)

3.2. Training Geography student-teachers Curriculum in Education Universities

Currently, Vietnam has 16 Training Geography teacher institutions in 3 main types of schools: Geography Departments of Education Universities, Geography Departments in Education Universities belong to General Universities and Geography subjects in the Education Departments of General University (figure 10). Their training curriculum is different but is designed and improved under the guidance of the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training on the output standards of the pedagogical schools. The following common points:

- Training curriculums are designed by the credit system, ranging from approximately 140 credits
- Training curriculums determines the output standards on qualities and competencies: Qualities, General competencies, professional Geography Competencies, professional teacher competencies.
- Training curriculums are divided into 3 blocks of knowledge - skills: General Knowledge and skills; Geography knowledge and skills; Teacher special knowledge and skills (figure 11).
- Training curriculums have increased the volume of modules and blocks of teaching methodology knowledge and professional teaching practice.
- Training content is changed and updated to be suitable for renewing Geography Education Curriculum.

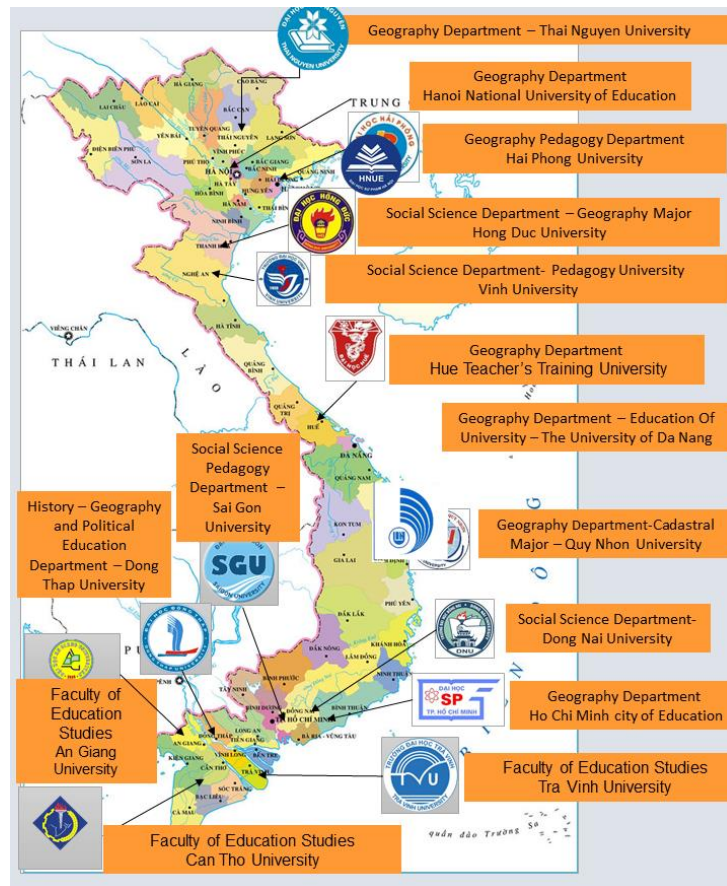


Figure 10. Training Geography student-teachers institutions in Vietnam (Source: authors)

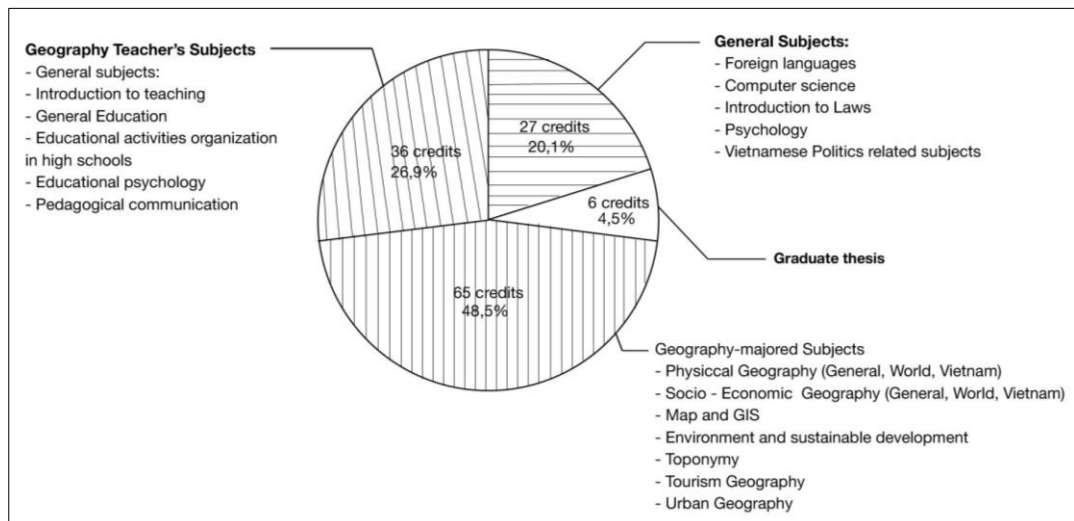


Figure 11. Geography Teacher Education curriculum of Geography Department – HCM city University of Education (Source: Geography Department – HCM city University of Education)(Education 2019)

3.3. Retraining Geography teachers

Enhancing Teacher Education Program (ETEP) is funded by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training and World Bank. Its goal is to develop Education Universities and Educational management institutions to enhance

the quality of teachers and education management through on-demand career development, meeting the needs of a fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education. The direct beneficiaries are teachers and school administrators.

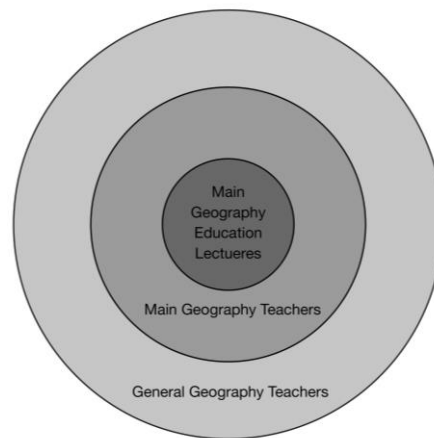


Figure 12: Retraining Teacher training is done by using the "oil slick" approach (Source: authors)

Retraining Teacher training is done by using the "oil slick" approach (figure 12) and blended learning method. Firstly, this program raises the education competencies for a small group of Geography lecturers at education universities. After that, they are responsible for developing professional skills for main geography teachers. Finally, the main Geography teachers perform this task for all Geography teacher. 70% of the volume of online learning knowledge and the remaining 30% face to face. There are 8 modules in all over a 3-year period.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study points to the essential improvements in the Geography Education Curriculum 2018 compared to 2006. It also provides a scientific basis to prove the rationality of those improvements. The highlight is to link between Geography Education Competency and the objectives of Geography Competencies in the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum. Research results can be consulted to improve teacher training & retraining curriculums in the departments of Geography.

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