




SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN VIETNAM



 Hai Nguyen Xuan

Associate Professor, PhD Department of Academics and Student Affairs
Hanoi Metropolitan University, Hanoi, Vietnam.

Email: haiblackocean@yahoo.co.uk Tel: +84989194611



ABSTRACT

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Inclusive Education (IE) for persons with disabilities has been the subject of growing attention for nearly three decades in Vietnam. Various programs have been introduced to meet the needs of persons with disabilities by the government, community, schools and other stakeholders. What has yet to be addressed is how to sustain IE for persons with disabilities for the next coming time in Vietnam? Although there has not been any research that is related directly to the issue and concept of sustainability for persons with disabilities in Vietnam, some authors have mentioned separately assessment, therapy, education and teaching in inclusive settings to meet the diverse needs of persons with disabilities. The goal of the present discussion is to draw a picture of IE in Vietnam in comparison to international contexts, then recommends six principles and three solutions to sustain the development of IE for persons with disabilities, which are in line with the current innovations in general education in the country.

Contribution/ Originality: By making a comparison to international contexts, the key finding is how to sustain the development of IE for persons with disabilities which is in line with the current innovations in general education with significantly changings and contribution to sustain and promote IE for the next coming time in Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is considered a new concept to identify not only the overall current development, but also to ensure its continuance into the future. Sustainable development of inclusive education is the aim of many countries and based on that, each country will have their own strategic plan which is consistent with the country's conditions of economics, society, politics, geography, and culture.

Summit on the Earth with the official named as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was conducted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil 1992. The summit involved over 200 countries' representatives, including Vietnam and a number of non-governmental organizations. Basic principles and an action plan for sustainable development with the name of Agenda 21 (Hoc, 2011) was established (Hoc, 2011).

The countries' representatives also committed to develop their own country's strategic plan for the sustainable development before 2005. Vietnam started with a project as VIE/01/021 "Support to Develop and Implement Agenda 21 for Vietnam" in November, 2001 which finished in 2005. The project provided a background for the implementation of Agenda 21 in Vietnam (Project VIE/01/021).

Vietnam Prime Minister had passed a strategic directive on sustainable development (Agenda 21 of Vietnam) in 2004. A National Committee of Sustainable Development of Vietnam was then established and its office was named the National Department of Sustainable Development. The most recent paper of the Vietnamese government is the National Action Plan to the Implementation of Agenda 2030 for the Sustainable Development of Vietnam put forth by the Minister included Decision N^o611/QĐ-TTĐ dated May 10th, 2017.

Although there has not been any research in Vietnam which has focused directly on sustainable development on inclusive education it has been mentioned on the specific perspectives on this issues such as “*Guidelines on the Implementation of School Quality through Self-Assessment and Improving Inclusive School*” by Dinh and Hai (2011). The guidelines suggest schools adopt a set of standards for self-assessment to improve inclusive schooling. The proposed set includes 05 standards with 10 criteria, 56 items:

- 1) Standard 1: Environments of school and classrooms (2 criteria with 15 items).
- 2) Standard 2: Social and psychological environments (2 criteria with 12 items).
- 3) Standard 3: Effective and suitable quality of inclusive education for children with disabilities (3 criteria with 18 items).
- 4) Standard 4: School structure and management (1 criterion with 1 item).
- 5) Cooperation between school, families, and communities (2 criteria with 7 items) (Dinh & Hai, 2011).

“*Reality of Ensuring the Rights of Children with Autism Disorders and Some Policy Recommendations*” by Protection Association of Children’s Rights (2016) presented several findings such as:

1) Descriptions of children with autism spectrum disorders are not very clear but awareness of stakeholders is recognized. Early detection of children with autism spectrum disorders has increased and they are receiving therapies, interventions, and education but knowledge and skills of supporters is limited.

2) Lack of official data on children with autism spectrum disorders in Vietnam by sectors, name of children with autism spectrum disorders in the regulations, and certificates for children with autism spectrum disorders. These are sometimes included with the names of children with mental problems.

3) Most children with autism spectrum disorders have received no support because their names are not listed in the law. Different stakeholders, especially school teachers, resource center staff, family members receive no support from the government on training or subsidies.

4) Human resources for support and education of children with autism spectrum disorders are limited, they support children with autism spectrum disorders by looking for knowledge on the internet or short training courses by foreign experts.

5) Vietnam Association Network of Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders has set up and organized many social activities to support persons with autism spectrum disorders. All assessments, interventions, therapies, and counselling have been happening in private centers, hospitals, and resource centers to meet the needs of children with autism spectrum disorders and their families. However, governmental organizations are not recognized as an active factor for supporting children with autism spectrum disorders and their families.

6) Parents of children with autism spectrum disorder typically are eager for knowledge and skills to support their children. Some even quit their stable jobs in the countryside and take their children to big cities programs with the hope that their children can overcome autism spectrum disorders. However, some families are not able to provide the same level of care for their children because of their difficult economic conditions.

7) Different sectors of society are trying to do their job in the field of disabilities, but there is little collaboration (Protection Association of Children’s Rights, 2016).

An examination of experiences in the United States to attempting to ensure the quality of inclusive education for children with intellectual disability – solutions and proposals for Vietnam by Hai (2015) is aimed at developing a set of standards, criteria, and solutions to improve the quality of inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities at preschools and general education settings (elementary and secondary schools) at our country based on

the experiences of the United States. Some creative and innovative ideas such as a theoretical and practical basis for developing solutions to ensure the quality of inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities. Currently, these solutions are not widely implemented due to (a) high quality of inclusive education for children with intellectual disabilities have not been created or developed by any research project and policy administrators in the national education system; (b) inexperience in developing assessment criteria regarding the quality of inclusive education in general and the quality of inclusive education for children with intellectual disability in Vietnam.

The project analyzed and assessed the reality, developed a set of criteria, and proposed solutions to ensure the educational quality for children with intellectual disability who have the most difficulties in learning at inclusive preschools, elementary schools, and secondary schools in Vietnam.

The project not only contributed to enrichment of the theoretical basis of inclusive education for children with disabilities in Vietnam, but also helped educational administrators and institutions organize inclusive education activities for children with intellectual disabilities effectively and improve the quality of schooling (Hai, 2015).

Another paper entitled Special Teacher Education towards Based Competency by Hai (2016) pointed out that 1) all the children with disabilities in inclusive settings require highly prepared teachers in inclusive education at various levels, ranging from short-term courses to certificates or diplomas; 2) training of inclusive education teachers should have standards-based approach with certain criteria. While the Vietnamese government has not passed teacher professional standards on inclusive education, there are some publications on various aspects of the subject: (i) *teacher competency requirements of early intervention education for children with disabilities* suggested 04 general standards with 18 criteria; (ii) *teacher competency on inclusive education* with criteria shown in description of the job including 04 skills in: (a) design of inclusive education activities (b) organization of inclusive education activities (c) instructions of teaching and learning; (d) evaluation of learning outcomes 3) the article suggests some solutions to preparing inclusive education teachers for Vietnam to meet the needs of children with disabilities learning in mainstream schools such as: a) make plans for teacher resource development, networking at different education levels, resource centers, and support staff on inclusive education; (b) develop and pass professional standards for teachers on inclusive education that are based on descriptions of jobs for each position/placement in schools, resource centers; (c) develop teacher education programs, textbooks/training materials and equipment to meet the needs of courses and different children with disabilities and implement these programs for teachers and education staff; (d) have one compulsory module on inclusive education in all university teacher training programs; (e) cooperate with internal and external organizations to mobilize resources to support teacher training programs (Hai, 2016).

Additionally, much research on assessment, therapy, education, teachings and learnings has been conducted by different scientists in the country to provide knowledge and skills for stakeholders to meet the needs of children with disabilities and look forward to ensuring a better quality of education for them. On the international level, some researchers who are well known in Vietnam are Richard and Jacqueline (2015) "*Creating and Sustaining Inclusive Schools*" which mentions the core criteria of forming and maintaining an inclusive school (Richard & Jacqueline, 2015) or Manabu (2015) "*International Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Tendency of Inclusive Education in Japan*" which focuses on developing an inclusive society [9].

2. DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TOWARD INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

In the early 1980s, the term sustainable development was first utilized in a strategy to protect/conservate the world in a proposal by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, World Fund for Wild Animals, and United Nations Programs of Environment with support from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The concept of sustainable development has more than 70 definitions. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), our Common Future released the report *Our Common Future*. The report included what is now one of the most widely recognized definitions of sustainable development. It provided the oft-cited definition of sustainable development as follows: “development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Hoc, 2018).

After the Brundtland Report, the definition of sustainable development became the key for nations to expand their points of view, directions, and solutions to address challenges regarding the issues of development. This was considered as a phase to open “United Nations Workshop on Development and Environment” and “World Forum on Globalization” and “World Summit on Sustainable Development”.

So, the concept of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report was not only an attempt to establish a balance between economics and environment or socio-economic development and environment protection, but it also included other perspectives of socio-politics, especially social equality. On this side, sustainable development could be an “alarm” or “sign” to warn behaviors of human beings in the world (Hoc, 2018).

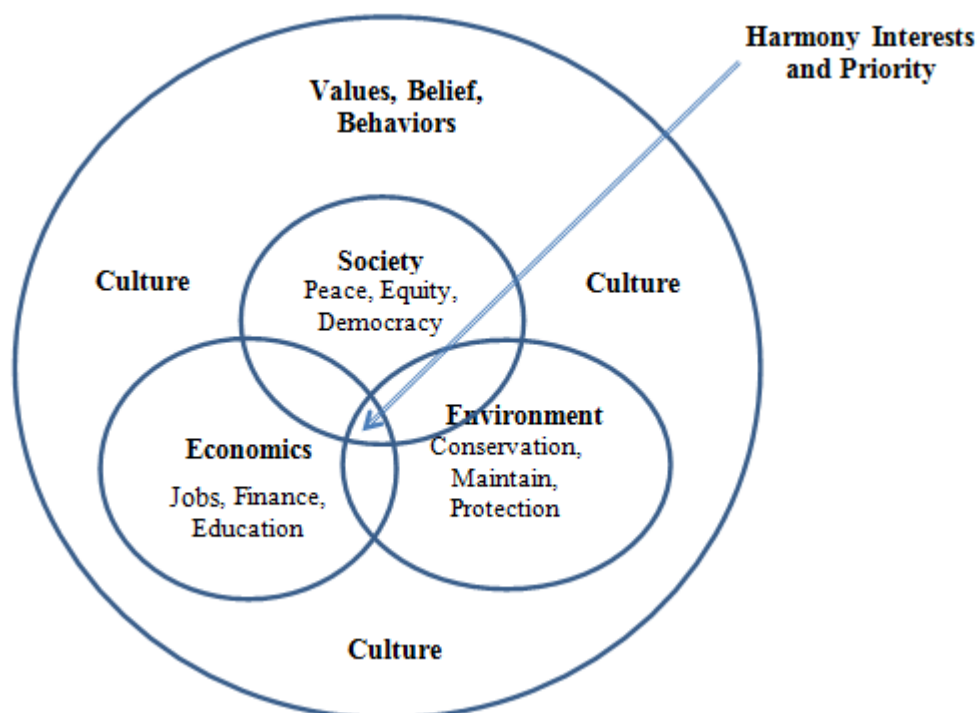


Figure-1. Sustainable development model by UNESCO.

Source: Hoc (2011).

3. DEFINITION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM

The concept of sustainable development was known by the end of 1980 and the early 1990s in Vietnam at different levels. Scientists on the environment, individuals, economics, society, laws, etc. have made significant progress in forming and manipulating the concept of sustainable development to suit the real-world conditions.

Research has been conducted related to the concept of sustainable development by Vietnamese scientists:

“For a Sustainable Development” by Research Centre of Resources and Environment (1995) the researchers adapted and accommodated the Brundtland Report’s definition of sustainable development as a process to address, at the same time, implementation of four fields: (a) economical sustainability; (b) humanities sustainability; (c) environment sustainability; and (d) technical sustainability (Research Centre of Resources and Environment, 1995).

“Research on Developing Criteria of Sustainable Development at National Level in Vietnam – Phase I” yielded a set of criteria for the nation’s sustainable development with the sustainable development of economics, society, and environment. The study also included some solutions to select the set of criteria for Vietnam sustainable

development which were based on references from sets of criteria for sustainable development of the Brundtland, USA, England, China, etc.

“*Management of Environment for the Sustainable Development*” (Hai, 2007) shown theoretical points of view and action for management of environment for sustainable development. The researchers identified sustainable development with three criteria: (a) economical sustainability; (b) environment sustainability; and (c) cultural sustainability (Hai, 2007). These criteria are in line with the model of sustainable development by UNESCO shown in Figure 1.

Some other sources, such as “*Innovation of Social Policy – Arguments and Solutions*” (Nam, 1997) identified a classifications of six indicators for sustainable development: (a) social development; (b) economic development; (c) environmental protection; (d) political development; (e) morality and intelligence; and (f) internationalization of development (Nam, 1997) “*Vietnam Sociology of Vietnam at the Door of the XXI Century*” (Thanh, 2003) contained a classification of seven indicators for sustainable development: (a) economics; (b) society; (c) environment; (d) politics; (e) morality, intelligence, culture; (f) role of the women; and (g) internationalization (Thanh, 2003).

In general, research in Vietnam shares the concept of sustainable development with the Brundtland Report. However, the forming and manipulating aspects listed as indicators of Vietnam sustainable development settings are not well clarified, especially at the locals, areas or industrial fields of society.

That said, the concept of sustainable development has been officially utilized in Vietnam since the Law on Environment Protection was passed in 2014, as item 4 of article 3 which stated: “*Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs based on the close and harmony combinations between growth of economics, insurance of social advances and protection of environment*”.

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF IE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN VIETNAM

Global goals at 4.5 in National Action Plan for the implementation of Agenda 2030 of the Sustainable Development by stated that: “*Up to 2030, all the vulnerable persons, including persons with disabilities, ethnic people and children in difficult circumstances will be ensured access to education and vocational trainings*”; at 4.8: “*Developing and upgrading educational institutions to meet the needs of a friendly with children and persons with disabilities as well as providing an environment with safety, non-violence, generalizing and effectiveness for all*”; at 4.7: “*all the learners will be equipped necessary knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development*”.

IE for persons with disabilities has been implemented for nearly 30 years in Vietnam, so it may be an appropriate time to discuss its sustainable development. As previously mentioned, there has not been any research directly related the issue in Vietnam, but some authors have discussed it.

Vietnam was the first country in Asia and second one in the world to sign the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which included the rights of children with disabilities in 1991. Since then, the Vietnamese government has signed and clarified many international conventions and treaties and passed a variety of national, ministerial regulations on caring, and educating persons with disabilities. Recently, the circular N^o 03 (January 29th, 2018) on Regulations on Inclusive Education for persons with disabilities and the Decision N^o 338 (January 30th, 2018) on Education Action Plan for persons with disabilities phase 2018-2020, both regulations by the Minister of Education and Training, whereby:

“1. Target of the year of 2020:

Increasing capacity of access and improving quality of education for persons with disabilities, ensuring persons with disabilities to benefit from quality, equality and friendly education.

2. Concrete objectives of the year of 2020:

- At least 70% persons with disabilities at an early age and general education benefit from quality, equality and friendly education.
- At least 50% school managers, teachers and education support staff for persons with disabilities get training courses on the field of education for persons with disabilities.
- At least 40% provinces set up the Support Center for Inclusive Education Development (Resource Center) at provincial level.
- 100% provincial and educational institutions get the propaganda and guidelines on regulations of education for persons with disabilities all over the country.

For summary, *sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam is considered in the country's contexts of human development, social and equal progress, sustainable reduction of the poor, social security and in a close relationship with environment and economics.*

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF IE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN VIETNAM

Hai, Villa, Thousand, and Muc (2020) in an article entitled, “*Inclusion in Vietnam: More than a Quarter Century of Implementation*” proposed some factors as principles for guiding sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam as follows (Hai et al., 2020):

Principle 1. People with Disabilities Are the Center of Sustainable Development

Everyone has a system/hierarchy of needs from the lowest to the highest as needs of being alive, safety, participation, respect and development. No one can meet all their needs by themselves. Needs of a person can just be met by their own community and others. However, persons with disabilities have obstacles for their development in physical or mental activities and although they always have all the needs of development, these needs require support from others to be able to participate and be included in social activities.

To sustain the development of inclusive education, individuals with disabilities need be at the center of thinking so as to ensure that the basic human needs and rights (safety, participation, belonging, respect, opportunities for personal development) that are common to all individuals are considered and addressed. All citizens have a right to equal opportunity for development in society, to access general resources, to get public benefit to create knowledge and culture for future generations.

Principle 2. Policies Supportive of Inclusive Education Underpin Inclusive Practice

A system of policies on inclusive education for persons with disabilities should help:

- Directions for organizations and governmental sections to be involved in supporting inclusive education.
- Make the policy corridor carry out education programs for persons with disabilities. Some of the national support programs for persons with disabilities have been approved and implemented, so they have fostered activities of inclusive education in practice.

However, the implementation of policies on inclusive education for persons with disabilities needs ensuring as:

- Meet the real needs of persons with disabilities in their own lives. Policies or regulations on inclusive education should be understood and implemented by educational institutions to support persons with disabilities, their families, and inclusive school teachers.
- Have a full range of prerequisites on human resources, techniques, and finances to be able to implement inclusive education at an acceptable level of quality and effectiveness.
- Make sure the connections of regulations from different stakeholders are unified at the national level; promote decentralization, and especially a clear identification of the role and responsibilities of local governments so that regulations can have the proper impact on beneficiaries.

- Clarify the monitoring mechanisms of regulations on the implementation of IE for persons with disabilities, their families, and inclusive teachers; provide human resources and related professional competencies as well as increase frequency of monitoring activities by the governmental sections with the participation of communities, local governments, social – mass organizations, families and the beneficiaries themselves.

Principle 3. Human Resource Development is Essential for Sustainable Development

Indicators of human resource development of IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam includes inclusive key teachers on inclusive education at schools, educational managers of different levels, educational support staff for persons with disabilities, researchers, university lecturers and others related.

Some issues that human resource development of IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam need to consider:

- Develop professional standards on IE for persons with disabilities such as job descriptions for different positions and use those standards to develop and evaluate human resource development of educational institutions. Core professional standards should compose of (a) professional knowledge; (b) professional practice; (c) professional values; and (d) professional relationships (Hai 2015).
- Develop training specializations on inclusive education for teacher education programs at universities and colleges to meet the need of qualified human resources on inclusive education in practice.
- Inclusive educational institutions should be proactive in developing and implementing in-service training courses on improving the competency level of human resource personnel for IE for persons with disabilities.

Principle 4. The Overall Quality of School Environments Must be Examined and Improved

Improving the quality of educational environments is regarded as a factor that cannot be separated from social development in general and the sustainable development. It also plays a very important role in the context of economics, culture, and social improvement of Vietnam.

School environments that ensure the sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities need to take some factors into account: (a) safety and non-violence; (b) respect of individual differences; (c) non-discrimination; (d) professional collaboration; (e) improve proactive teaching and learning methods; (g) encourage the participation of families and communities (Dinh & Hai, 2011).

Principle 5. A System of Support Services is Essential for Sustainable Development

IE for persons with disabilities cannot reach the expected level of quality and effectiveness and its sustainable development without a system of support services. Institutions of support services in Vietnam now include: (a) support center of inclusive education development (commonly called resource center); (b) educational institutions (special and inclusive schools, centers); (c) room for supporting inclusive education in school; (d) center of early intervention; and (e) other educational institutions enacting support services of IE for persons with disabilities and under management of the educational sector (Hai, 2018).

Vietnam's system of support services for the sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities requires:

(a) cover basic regulations and governmental management, directly from the Ministry of Education and Training to develop and conduct activities of support services for persons with disabilities as:

- Standards of establishment and conducting the institution's activities which provide support services for persons with disabilities on facilities, management, personnel, programs of support services, etc.
- Guide to how to use support services in IE for persons with disabilities, by both public and private institutions.
- Organize the monitoring of activities to support private and public institutions of IE for persons with disabilities.

(b) ensure the qualifications of professional positions in institutions that provide support services to IE for persons with disabilities, such as: teachers, educational support staff for persons with disabilities, staff of assessment, therapists, staff of counselling, etc.

(c) meet conditions of quality assurance of institutions that provide support services on IE for persons with disabilities in support programs, qualifications and experiences of staff, facilities, technical equipment, etc.

(d) guarantee the multidisciplinary corporations, especially between education, labor, institutions, etc., organizes activities of support services systems.

(e) promote by means of the media the needs of supports of persons with disabilities, information about the institutions providing support services on IE for persons with disabilities (place/address, staff, capacity of providing services, finance, and other necessary information).

(g) mobilize community resources, supports for organizations and, individuals who are from inside and outside the country; increase exchange and sharing of experience with international experts to promote the development and effectiveness of institutions in providing support services on IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam for the coming time (Report on Policy Recommendations on Developing Support Services in Inclusive Education for persons with disabilities in Vietnam by [Hanoi National University of Education \(2018\)](#)).

Principle 6. Collaboration and Coordination Is Needed Among Internal and External Organizations

Inclusive education is regarded as a multidisciplinary field, the success and sustainable development of which requires the participation and collaboration of different stakeholders, of which the education sector is the center point to ensure the effectiveness of these corporations.

The participation of these organizations in IE for persons with disabilities includes ([Hai, 2010](#)):

(a) cooperate in organizing cultural, sport, outside activities in and out of schools, especially in the opportunities in the starting of school year, semester and end of school year, annual summer holiday, etc.

(b) as for individuals, each sector needs to see and acquire thoughts from families and organizations that relate to the shared responsibilities to implement their own functions effectively in IE for persons with disabilities.

(c) cooperate exchange and sharing of information frequently between sectors, organizations; incorporate knowledge and solving problems in a timely manner related to IE for persons with disabilities.

(d) create friendly inclusive education environments in and out of schools, enhance and promote the potential of sectors and organizations to acquire full and active involvement of persons with disabilities towards the development of a culture of sustainable inclusive education.

(e) facilitate support monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of the cooperation between school, local government, community, and families in IE for persons with disabilities.

f) receive more support and resources on technology, expert advice, and financial support from international organizations for the development of inclusive education in Vietnam.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam can be seen in [Figure 3](#) below:

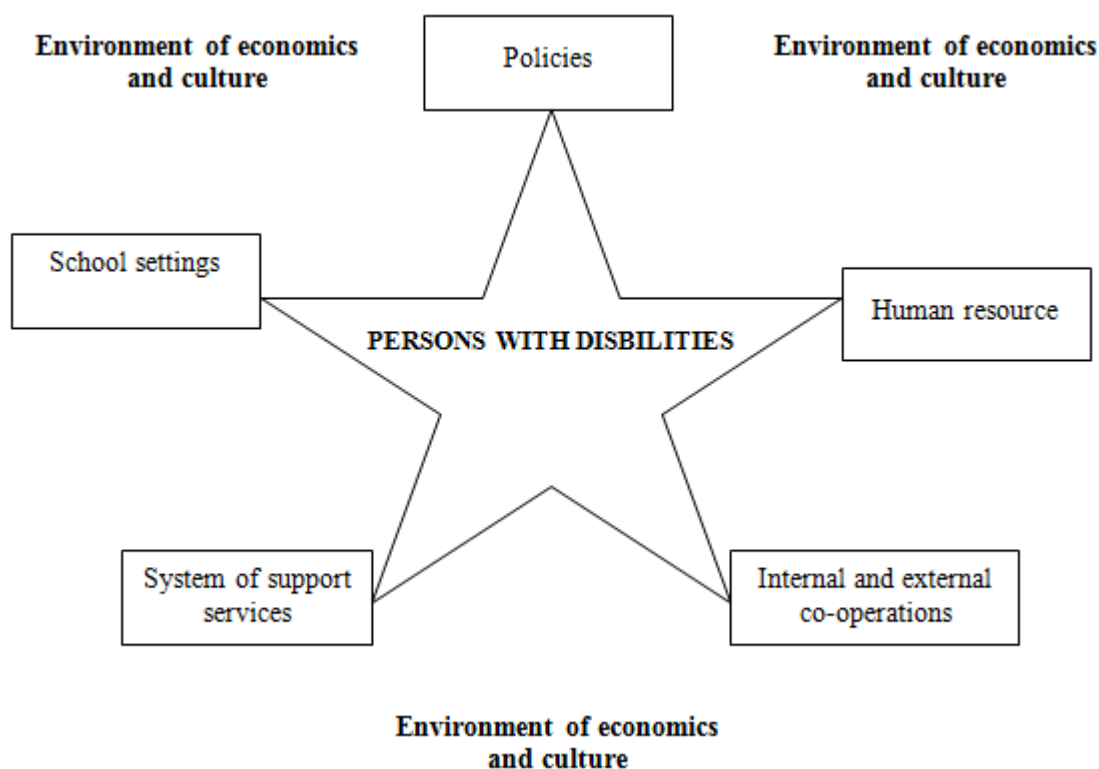


Figure-3. Six principles for guiding sustainable development of inclusive education in Viet Nam.

Source: Hai et al. (2020).

It is the appropriate time to pay attention to the sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam. One of the most important aspects of the development of IE for persons with disabilities is that plans and solutions of inclusive education should be in line with innovations of general education in Vietnam. Therefore, we propose some recommendations for the sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities in Vietnam as the follows:

1) Vietnam MOET has just passed two important regulations as Circular No 03 (January 29, 2018) on Regulations to Inclusive Education for persons with disabilities and Decision No 338 (January 30, 2018) on Action Plan of Education for persons with disabilities phase 2018-2020. Therefore, Vietnam MOET needs to prepare for the evaluation of the implementation of the decision N^o 338 and develop an action plan for sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities phase 2021-2025 and direction to 2030.

2) Research to develop and apply a set of standards to evaluate sustainable development of IE for persons with disabilities.

3) Identify and mobilize resources to implement the priorities of inclusive education toward quality assurance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

As we have attempted to capture in the above illustration, the concept of inclusive education encompasses both public policy makers and the community and draws upon multiple sources to support sustainability. While we believe it is time to consider sustainability, we urge the research community to initiate more studies to document the current status of inclusion in Vietnam. We deem the fidelity of quality classroom practices an important prerequisite to the sustainability of inclusive education.

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