

THEORY AND TEACHING THEORY TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL AND HUMANITY SCIENCE RESEARCH OF STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Theory instructs science researches for it is generally experience and knowledge that has been accumulated from generation to generation. Furthermore, theory also provides researchers basic knowledge to argue and interpret matters of research. However, in most of universities, little attention has been paid to theory to be introduced, studied and applied. Structure of a discipline often comprises of terms, objects, function of discipline or the establishment and development progress, material sources, research methods, which completely lacks of research theory frame. It can be said that universities should take lead in introducing and instructing students to researching and applying theory. Besides, academic theory works are necessarily translated and published.

Keywords: *theory, social, humanity, reseach, student*

1. INTRODUCTION

To improve the human being life, people have constantly thought about the natural and social world. These thoughts led to give birth sciences. The purpose of science concerns the expansion of knowledge, the discovery of truth and to make predictions. Theory building is the means by which the basic researchers hope to achieve this purpose. However, now in the training program at universities of social sciences and humanities, usually only pay attention to conveying specialized knowledge content, methodological or technical practice but not pay much attention to the teaching of the theoretical system of each specialty. This article refers to the role of theory in the study of social sciences and humanity, that indicates the necessity of teaching theory in universities to improve the quality of student on researching social and humanities sciences.

2. THE ROLE OF THEORY IN SOCIAL AND HUMANITY SCIENCE RESEARCH

What is theory? There many different definitions of theory such as:

Merriam - Webster's Learner's Dictionary definite: Theory is an idea or set of ideas that is intended to explain facts or events; or an idea that is suggested or presented as possibly true but that is not known or proven to be true; or the general principles or ideas that relate to a particular subject (Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary).

A scientific theory is a specific type of theory used in the scientific method. Jaime Tanner said "The way that scientists use the word 'theory' is a little different than how it is commonly

used in the lay public". He further explained that a scientific theory is the framework for observations and facts. Theories may change, or the way that they are interpreted may change, but the facts themselves don't change. Tanner likens theories to a basket in which scientists keep facts and observations that they find. The shape of that basket may change as the scientists learn more and include more facts." (Alian Bradford, 2015).

The University of California, Berkley defines a theory as "a broad, natural explanation for a wide range of phenomena. Theories are concise, coherent, systematic, predictive, and broadly applicable, often integrating and generalizing many hypotheses". Any scientific theory must be based on a careful and rational examination of the facts. Facts and theories are two different things. In the scientific method, there is a clear distinction between facts, which can be observed and/or measured, and theories, which are scientists' explanations and interpretations of the facts. An important part of scientific theory includes statements that have observational consequences. A good theory, has unity, which means it consists of a limited number of problem-solving strategies that can be applied to a wide range of scientific circumstances. Another feature of a good theory is that it formed from a number of hypotheses that can be tested independently (Alian Bradford, 2015).

According to Terry Eastwood the word "the theory comes from the Greek *theoria* and more directly in modern use from the Latin *teoria*, meaning a looking at, viewing, contemplation, or speculation. In English, the word came to mean mental view or contemplation from as early as the sixteenth century. This sense of the word was captured by Norris writing in 1710 to the effect that "speculative knowledge contemplates. Truth for itself, and accordingly stops and rest in contemplation of it, which is what we commonly call theory" (Terry Eastwood, 2016, p.122-123).

In word web dictionary, theory including three meanings: (1) A well – substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world; an organized system of accepted knowledge that applies in a variety of circumstances to explain a specific set of phenomena; (2) A tentative insight into the natural world; a concept that is not yet verified but that if true would explain certain facts or phenomena; (3) A belief that can guide behavior (<http://www.wordwebonline.com>).

Concerning the term "theory" with the term "theoretician" and "theorist" means the theory or theorist, founder of the theory. The verb "theorise" or "theorize" that created the theory, construction, forming the theory of a particular discipline. In addition, it also means reasoning. Adjectives "theoretical" or "theoretic" means theoretical (Princeton University 2006). Vu Cao Dam in the book "*Methodology of scientific research*" assumes that theory system is a criterion of scientific discipline. The theory is scientific knowledge systems including concepts, categories, rules (Vu Cao Dam, 1999, p.19).

Vietnamese Dictionary of Language Studies Institute (Edited by Hoang Phe), the word "theory" is the term for the following three possible interpretations: the first, old and rarely used in the sense of "theory" as "reasoning"; the second, the theory of theoretical knowledge (say generalizations), contrary to the practice; The third, theoretical constructions of intellectual systematic, hypothesis nature, synthesized to explain a certain

phenomenon. Concerning the concept of "theory" with the concept of "reasoning". In terms of categories, the term "theory" is interpreted as a system of generalized ideas from practical experience, directing work practices, generalized knowledge and extensive systems; verb "theory" means talking theory, explained by the theory (implying criticism) (Hoang Phe, 1997, p.545).

In Dictionary and Philosophy nouns, Tran Van Hien Minh defines: reasoning is "Discourse based on reason, on theory"; theorists are "experts on logic"; theory is "Learning to know, not to apply to actions, called the theory; and learning theory " Aristote classification, mathematics, physics and theology, both theoreticians (as opposed to practising and poetry learning), in which the human thorough use his intellectual (Tran Van Hien Minh, 1966, tr.140).

Thus, theory is a set of propositions or clauses established by observation or experiment. However, how to explain the meaning of the word "theory" theory is different. In generally, theory is understood that the system of knowledge, scientific knowledge, concepts, categories and rules about the nature of things and the basic relationship between things in the real world.

Role of theory in research

The theory is the foundation for research in all fields. Because, the theory is the experience, the accumulated knowledge of generations, providing the research base of knowledge to argue and interpret research issues. Each scientific discipline has its theoretical system. Each theory contributes a valuable perspective and has its particular value. The establishing of a theory is the result of a process of scientific thinking, associated with theoretical concepts, new terminologies.

Playfair writing in 1819 on "Natural Phylosophy" observed that "a theory is often nothing else but contrivance for comprehending a certain number of facts under one expression" (Terry Eastwood, 2016, p.123).

In the article "*Role of theory in social research*", Talcott Parsons (1938) assumed that "The process of the growth of scientific is not a process of accumulation of discrete discoveries of "fact". In the first place our study of fact, however little we may be aware of it, is always guided by the logical structure of a theoretical scheme, even if it is entirely implicit. (Talcott Parsons,1938, p.14-15). Talcott Parsons emphasized the importance of theory to empirical research is providing analytical framework to find out the nature of things, phenomena. But the actual research is extremely rich, the survey is not always entirely appropriate for an analytical framework (Talcott Parsons,1938, p.19)

Palansky (1986) admitted "nothing is more practical than with a good theory guiding action [research]" (Elizabeth Moore Plinois, 2007, p.307)

John Scott (2009) commitment to social theory as the core sociological activity dates from his early engagement with the work of Talcott Parsons and has been inspired by that writer's commitment to theoretical synthesis. Scott's view is that behind the contending theoretical *explanations* proposed by different theorists there is a set of *concepts* that constitutes a shared foundation for sociological analysis." (John Scott, 2009, p.760-761)

H. Russell Bernard (2009), Cultural Anthropologist, Florida University, gave an ideal research process in which the most important first step is to "form a theoretical problem" and the last step is "testing the theoretical problems outlined (H. Russell Bernard, 2009, p.105).

Systems theory is an expression of scientific thought (different from common sense) as Do Kien Cuong said, "Science is a system of empirical knowledge, theory and practice on the natural world and society, derived from the global research by the scientific methods " (Do Kien Cuong, 2010, p.12)

In a study of social science, identifying research theory it means that have answered theoretical questions "what is studying". The theory is used to demonstrate the scientific hypothesizes, in order to have a good scientific work, the first thing is to understand and apply appropriate research theory.

3. STATUS OF THE TEACHING AND APPLICATION OF THEORETICAL STUDY AT UNIVERSITY

Theory plays an important role in scientific research, but the teaching, research and application of theory has not been much interested in universities. Structural official program of each discipline usually includes: the concept, object, tasks and the process of formation and development, resources, research methods and specialized knowledge , completely lacking the theoretical system of the discipline.

For example, the content outline of Ethnology course in Thu Dau Mot university includes 6 chapters. The chapter 1 includes concept "ethnography", objects and tasks of the discipline, the process of formation and development, resources and research methods of ethnography, the relationship between ethnology with history, archaeology, linguistics, cultural study, sociology. Chapter 2: The issue of race. Chapter 3: linguistic, chapter 4: the peoples. Chapter 5 of the social institutions and religious, chapter 6. Family institutions. Thus according to this program structure not provided students about research theoretical system in ethnography.

On the other hand, now in Vietnam has the lack of works on research theory. Most of the books on the theory written in English, so students hardly reach this work due to the limitation of their language.

Students who have not been equipped with research theory and also can not explore this issue from many other sources (because of restrictions on foreign languages). They also do not know to apply research theory when writing research paper. In the "An Notes of scientific research students" (University of Thu Dau Mot) including 11 requires of the content "Object and scope of research, research methods" absolutely no mention to "approach" (theory research).

In the guide book "The presentation of Bachelor thesis" of the Faculty of Anthropology, University of Social Sciences & Humanities of Hanoi marked "Prologue: stating the urgency of the subject, meaning science learning and practice, research purposes, object and scope of the research, research methods; Part of content: including the

program ... (The Faculty of Anthropology, 2013, p.1). Thus the research proposal guidelines at the leading university with has yet to pay proper attention to research theory.

Like the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi, when writing Bachelor thesis, Students of the Social Sciences and Humanity Ho Chi Minh City is also not interested in research theory. In the introduction will comprise the items "research reason and research problem overview, object and scope of the research, research methods and sources, new contributions of the thesis," absolutely no mention to " research theory" (or approaches).

In a document "Methodology of scientific research in the students' union of the Ho Chi Minh City (guide students to participate in student awards for scientific research - Eureka) specify the sequence consisting of scientific research six basic steps:

1. Detection Research Issues
2. Developing hypothesis
3. Building an Argument
4. Find the theoretical arguments and practical arguments
5. Analyze data

6. Writing research result, conclusions and recommendations (The Youth Union of Ho Chi Minh City, 2013, p.1). Glance occasionally, this guide is highly likely mention to research theory but to paraphrase below, guidance documents to explain "to find theoretical arguments is to build research rationale. Once identified the theoretical arguments, the researcher know which scientific disciplines should apply to research work

The guidelines also be obscure about research theory so students can not clearly understand what the theory is, and the role of the application of theory to case studies research.

Theory is the guiding principle of research but in the curriculum of students in the social sciences and humanities at universities completely lacking theoretical system, so the work of students are not applied research theory. That makes the study results may not convincing, and the research work of students lack academic.

4. THE MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE TRAINING OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESOURCES AND HUMANITIES

Understanding the importance of building a theoretical framework proven in scientific theories, we have recognized that the shortage of theoretical knowledge will influence on the quality of scientific research. To perform well the task of training the quality human resources of social sciences and humanity to the social, universities need to train students research theory, guide students to apply theory in their research paper. And universities should have a long-term strategy with specific tasks:

Adding "research theory" or "research schools" in the 1st chapter of each discipline to help students get the basic knowledge about the theoretical system of discipline. Every theory, students need to understand the formation and development of the theory, theoretical content and implications of research. Besides should encourage students to write research

paper by applying a theory to explain the phenomenon of culture, society. For example in the course “General Anthropology” will introduce *The Social Evolutionism* of Lelwis Henry Morgan, Edward Tylor, *The Relativity of linguistics* of Benjamin L. Whorf, *The Functionalism* of Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Symbolic interaction theory* - Clifford Geertz, *The Rational choice* - Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, *The Ecological culture* - Julian Steward, *The Structuralism* - Émile Durkheim and Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Habitus* - Pierre Bourdieu, *The Post-Modernism* - Jean Francois Lyotard and the *Post- Structuralism* - Michel Foucault...In cultural studies can apply the theories: theory of *Universal culture* - Edward Tylor; *The Unique cultural theory* - Franz Boas; *Acculturation theory* - Alfred Kroeber. Theory of *economic – culture* style is used commonly in the study of anthropology, history and culture. However, now researchers can use interdisciplinary theory, the boundaries between disciplines are blurred. In summary, research theory system in the social sciences is extremely rich, an important issue is how can we convey to the students the basic knowledge to be able to continue to self-learning, research and application of theory to their research, That enhance the quality of academic research, not inferior to the world academic background. Application the research theory to "stand on the shoulders of giants" to integrating into the world academic background.

In order to students understanding how to apply the research theory, besides providing the contents of research theories, should provide them articles involved in these theories. Such as: the Evolutionism and the article “*The stage of ethnic*” of Lewis Henry Morgan and “*Social Mechanism*” of Herbert Spencer. To understand the Functionism should read “*Kula ring*” of Bronislaw Malinowski, “*The role of the uncle in South Africa*” of A.R.Radcliffe-Brown. Theory of cultural ecology and the article “*Energy and cultural evolution.*” , the article “*Four Winnebago legendary: a structural schema*” and the Structuralism. To understand the symbolic interaction theory could read “*Symbol of Ndembu Ritual* (from *The Forest of Symbol works*)” by Victor Turner or all “*the Description of the cockfight Balinese* (from work the *Interpretation of Culture*) by Clifford Geertz ...

Further, the training program can be designed a module “social theory, the history of theory and the implications of the study” (The program was implemented successfully by the Social Sciences Institute of Southern in 2009-2010). Contents of this module will give students the basic knowledge about of the Social research theory and also guide students to choose and develop research topics that can be applied to a particular research theory.

In recent there are so many books written about the research theory in English, French, the University let translate some basic works for students can access resources on theory. For example: *An Invitation to social theory* of David Inglis and Christopher Thorpe; *The Teaching yourself social theory* of David Harris, *The Interpretation and Social Knowledge works - On the use of theory in the human sciences* of Ariall Isaac Reed. *Essential Theory for Social Work Practice* of Chris Beckett. And About evolutionism, a work “*Evolutionary theory in Social Science*” of Michael Schmid.

To be able to understand the contents of the theory, and applied research theory into research the universities should have programmes for practising research because “A theory also can be used to generate hypotheses that can be tested by research. The results of such

research may provide evidence that supports the theory, which, in turn strengthens the theory. On the other hand, research may produce results that causes the theory to be revised, or rejected. Thus, there is a strong interrelationship between theory and research, as illustrated by the double headed arrow between those two circles in Figure 1” (National Assistive Technology Research Institute, 2006)

Figure 1. Model illustrating the relationships among theory, research, and practice (source: National Assistive Technology Research Institute (2006), “The Role of Theory and Research in Practice”)



Theory has laid the foundation for scientific research. As words of the artist Leonard da Vinci has confirmed (the 16th century) "The love practice without theory is like the sailor steering the ship without rudder and compass will not know where he can go" Leonard da Vinci (1888). To give prominence to the role of the theory we also have to pay attention to the specific circumstances of each theory was born. The world theoretical research achievements are the crystallization of human wisdom.

Universities should be the forefront in introducing the theory system, also research and applying theory in scientific research. In addition, we need a strategy for translation and introduction of the classic theory. Identifying theory research framework, the research results will contribute to the review of the theory. This is the basic and important task of each researcher, it provides scientific achievements for each specialty and orienting research for each discipline. Due to theory, the scientific research gradually achieve three major goals "the 1st Advance the country's intellectual, thereby improving people's knowledge. The 2nd provide products of the country's livelihoods and the 3rd found the impact on economic and social development policies " (Pham Duy Hien, 2013)

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