

Governing Generative Ai in Vietnamese Higher Education: Policy Architecture, Institutional Absence, and The Road To September 2027

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam legislated artificial intelligence faster than almost any comparable middle-income state, moving from a first national AI strategy in 2021 to a standalone Law on Artificial Intelligence in December 2025. Universities occupy an odd position inside the resulting framework. This study asks what Vietnamese AI policy actually requires of higher education institutions, and whether those requirements reach the classroom before the Law's education-sector grace period closes on 1 September 2027. Thirty-one policy instruments issued between 2020 and 2026 were screened, sixteen of them bearing directly on higher education, and read against the empirical literature on Vietnamese universities, with each instrument coded by governance level and by policy dimension. National provision turns out to be dense and internally consistent. Sectoral provision is narrower than it first appears, since the binding competency instrument regulates what learners should be able to do rather than what institutions must do, and the higher education framework remained unissued throughout the study period. At the institutional level, the public record is close to empty. Four gaps follow from this: the one enforceable sectoral instrument addresses the wrong party; ethical commitments repeated at the highest level have not become anyone's specific duty; nothing at any level governs generative AI in coursework, theses, or examinations; and only 15.4% of surveyed faculty at one institution had received formal AI training. Viet Nam therefore presents a configuration the comparative literature has not described in which strong state direction coexists with an unwritten institutional layer.

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Introduction

Universities did not get to choose when generative AI arrived. Within three years of the first public large language model interfaces, students across many systems were using such tools for academic work while their institutions were still deciding whether to permit it, how disclosure should work, and what counted as misconduct (Chan, 2023; Cotton et al., 2024). The difficulty this creates is not technological. It is that rules have to be written quickly, by institutions, for practices that national governments can describe but cannot reach.

The Vietnamese state has been closing its end of that distance at speed. A National Strategy on Research, Development and Application of Artificial Intelligence was approved in January 2021 (Decision No. 127/QĐ-TTg; Prime Minister of Viet Nam, 2021). In December 2024 the Politburo issued Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW (Politburo of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, 2024), treating science, technology, innovation and digital transformation as a breakthrough priority and setting the target of a top-three position in Southeast Asian AI research and development by 2030. February 2025 brought Circular No. 02/2025/TT-BGDĐT, a Digital Competency Framework for Learners with one of its six domains given over to AI (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025a). The National Assembly passed the Law on Digital Technology

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Industry in June 2025 (National Assembly of Viet Nam, 2025a), and on 10 December 2025 passed Law No. 134/2025/QH15 on Artificial Intelligence (National Assembly of Viet Nam, 2025b), which took effect on 1 March 2026 and made Viet Nam one of the first states in the region with a comprehensive risk-tiered AI statute.

One date in that statute is the reason for this paper. AI systems in finance, healthcare and education were given eighteen months to comply rather than the twelve granted elsewhere, so the education sector's obligations become fully enforceable on 1 September 2027. Vietnamese universities are inside that window now.

Whether they emerge from it in compliance is less certain than the legislative record suggests. UNESCO's Artificial Intelligence Readiness Assessment for Viet Nam praised the clarity of national policy while naming implementation, teacher capacity, and "specific regulations and guidance on ethics and responsibility in AI applications" as what remained outstanding (UNESCO, 2025, p. 51). The same report noted that the Ministry of Education and Training had competency frameworks for schools either issued or nearly finished, while the equivalents for vocational and higher education were still being planned. Generative AI use is heaviest in the part of the education system with the least sectoral guidance.

Three questions organise what follows:

Question 1: What is the architecture of Viet Nam's AI policy as it applies to higher education, and how has it developed between 2020 and 2026?

Question 2: How far does this national architecture reach into the institutional level at which generative AI is used in teaching, assessment, and research?

Question 3: What governance gaps emerge from this analysis, and what design principles should inform Vietnamese university policy before September 2027?

No consolidated account of Vietnamese AI policy as it bears on universities was found in the databases searched, and none of the located studies takes in the 2025 statutes. Building one is the first thing this paper does. It then codes that policy field by governance level and policy dimension, which turns a general complaint about implementation into a statement about which specific cells are empty, and converts the result into design principles that can be acted on inside a defined window. The claim is not that Viet Nam has governed generative AI badly. It is that the governing has happened at a level that cannot touch the practices most at risk.

Literature Review

Governing Generative AI in Higher Education

Artificial intelligence in higher education has a research history far older than ChatGPT, and for most of that history, the questions were instrumental. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) surveyed the field and found work on profiling, prediction, assessment, adaptive systems and tutoring, produced largely by computer scientists and engineers, with little connection to educational theory and less to ethics or governance. Williamson and Eynon (2020) read the same history and drew out what it had left aside: questions of power, of whose interests the technology served, and of public accountability.

Generative models broke that pattern because they acted on the artefacts through which universities certify that learning has occurred. Earlier systems supported instruction. Text generation intervened in the essay, the report, the literature review and the thesis. Bearman et al. (2023) traced how institutional discourse responded. They found it divided between an imperative framing, in which adoption was inevitable and necessary, and a framing organised around threat to academic standards. Neither produces usable rules. The first has trouble asking where limits should fall, and the second has trouble conceding that some uses are legitimate.

What has emerged instead is differentiated permission. The AI Assessment Scale (Perkins et al., 2024) sets five levels of permitted generative AI involvement, from none to full, and obliges the instructor to declare which level applies before the task is set. It has been taken up by more than 350 institutions. Its importance for this paper lies in what it reveals about scale: the unit at which generative AI governance becomes operable is the individual assessment task, and no statute reaches that far down. Cotton et al. (2024) arrived at something compatible from the integrity side, concluding that detection-led responses are unstable and that redesigning assessment while requiring disclosure is the more durable approach.

Frameworks for Institutional Policy

If the task falls to institutions, what should an institutional policy contain? Chan (2023) put that question to 457 students and 180 teaching and administrative staff across Hong Kong universities, and organised the answer into three dimensions. The pedagogical dimension covers teaching, assessment design and AI literacy. The governance dimension covers privacy, security, accountability, equitable access and academic integrity. The operational dimension covers infrastructure, procurement, licensing and staff training. Separating them matters because institutions routinely conflate them, declaring a pedagogical position on AI while leaving the governance and operational questions untouched.

Li et al. (2026) asked how these policies differ by national context, comparing guidelines from leading universities in the United States, Japan and China. Their findings describe three quite different relationships between state and institution. American institutions in their sample stressed faculty autonomy, practical application and policy adaptability. Japanese institutions aligned closely with government positions and led with ethics and risk management, while saying comparatively little about implementation. Chinese institutions reflected centralised direction, concentrating on technology application rather than early policy formulation. Strong state direction, on this evidence, does not reliably produce strict institutional rules.

Above all of this sits UNESCO's normative layer. The Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (UNESCO, 2021) set out principles; the Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research (UNESCO, 2023) translated them for the sector. The Guidance is unusual in placing a duty on institutions themselves, requiring them to validate generative AI systems before deploying them with students, and proposing thirteen as a minimum age for independent student use of such platforms. Most national frameworks, Viet Nam's included, do not allocate that duty to anyone. Jobin et al. (2019) had already documented the wider pattern, in which the worldwide proliferation of AI ethics guidelines produced broad agreement on principles alongside continuing disagreement about what they require in practice. Nguyen et al. (2023), writing partly from Vietnamese institutions, made the same argument for education specifically: principles bind practice only when they become the obligations of identifiable roles.

Generative AI in Vietnamese Higher Education

Vietnamese empirical work on the subject has grown quickly around a narrow set of questions. Most of it applies technology acceptance models to student adoption, using TAM, UTAUT, or extensions adding trust and personal innovativeness, and most of it reports high intention to use with perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use as the main determinants. For governance purposes the limitation is built into the design. Acceptance models explain why individuals take up a tool. They say nothing about what an institution should allow.

Institutional questions have attracted less work. Nguyen et al. (2026) surveyed 156 lecturers at Hanoi Metropolitan University, analysed institutional documents and interviewed 20 faculty members. Two thirds of lecturers, 67.9%, had experimented with AI tools, while 12.8% used them in daily teaching. Formal institutional training had reached 15.4%. Interest in such

training stood at 89.1%. The authors read this as a gap between what AI can do and what is being used; read as governance evidence, it describes an institution where individual experimentation has run well ahead of anything the institution has decided.

Studies of academic integrity in Vietnamese universities point the same way. Students show reasonable general awareness of plagiarism conventions and considerable uncertainty about whether those conventions extend to generated text, and the papers close by calling for clear institutional guidelines, AI literacy provision and redesigned assessment. Recommendations of that kind are made in the absence of the thing recommended. None of this literature asks whether the national policy framework enables such institutional rules, requires them, or gets in their way.

Research Gap

The Vietnamese evidence base is almost entirely individual-level and adoption-focused, documenting behaviour without examining the regulatory environment in which it occurs. The comparative governance literature that does examine institutional policy has drawn on the United States, Japan, China, Hong Kong and Europe, and Li et al. (2026) present their typology as something to be extended rather than a finished account; Southeast Asian state-led systems are absent from it. Nothing published treats Viet Nam's AI instruments as a connected architecture bearing on universities, and nothing considers what Law No. 134/2025/QH15 means for higher education during its grace period.

Methodology

Research Design

The study uses qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Cardno, 2018) together with an integrative review of empirical scholarship. What is under examination here is a body of authoritative texts and the relations between them rather than the attitudes or behaviour of individuals, which is what document analysis is suited to. Policy documents are read as data, for what they say, for what they leave out, and for the positions they take up.

Reading is interpretive rather than a measurement against some external benchmark. Bacchi's (2009) orientation is useful because it directs attention past what an instrument prescribes to how it constitutes the problem it is answering, and the construction of the problem determines who ends up with obligations. An instrument that treats AI in education as a question of workforce supply will generate duties for curriculum planners and none at all for examination boards. Silences are therefore treated as findings, subject to the caution set out under Limitations.

Document Corpus

Thirty-one instruments issued between June 2020 and March 2026 were screened into the corpus. Sixteen of these bear directly on higher education and are set out in Table 1; the remainder establish the surrounding digital-transformation and science-policy context and are cited in the analysis where relevant. To be included a document had to come from a Vietnamese state, Party or ministerial body; be in force, adopted, or formally published in draft during the period; and bear on artificial intelligence, digital transformation or higher education governance in a way that creates duties, targets or competency requirements. Instruments confined to a single non-education sector, health-sector digital transformation decisions among them, were noted for context and left out of the coding.

Five categories are represented: Party resolutions, laws of the National Assembly, Prime Ministerial decisions and government resolutions, ministerial circulars and decisions from MOET, and formally published draft strategies. Drafts were included where their content is authoritatively documented, on the grounds that a draft shaping ministerial planning is part of

the environment universities have to anticipate. They are identified as drafts throughout, and their draft status is itself treated as a finding.

Two provenance points should be stated. The draft Strategy for the Application of AI in the Education Sector by 2030 was not available in full text and is characterised here from UNESCO's summary of it, so claims about its content are second-hand. Details of Law No. 134/2025/QH15 were read from the promulgated text together with published legal commentary, and the eighteen-month grace period for education is reported on that basis. Instruments were otherwise located through the Viet Nam National Database of Legal Normative Documents, ministerial portals, and the documentary appendices of UNESCO's readiness assessment (UNESCO, 2025), which was compiled with the Viet Nam National Institute of Educational Sciences and reviewed by Vietnamese legal scholars and so provides a verified inventory. Official English translations were used where they exist. Where they do not, the Vietnamese text was read directly and the citation records the Vietnamese instrument number.

Review Corpus

Scholarly sources came from Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar and the Vietnam Citation Gateway, combining generative AI terms ("generative artificial intelligence", "ChatGPT", "large language model") with sector terms ("higher education", "university", "academic integrity") and setting terms ("Viet Nam", "Vietnamese"), across 2019 to 2026. Peer-reviewed studies reporting empirical evidence on generative AI in Vietnamese higher education were retained, along with the conceptual and comparative work supplying the analytical frameworks. The review is integrative rather than systematic and attempts no meta-analytic synthesis, since the aim is to characterise what is known rather than to pool findings.

Analytical Framework

Two axes organise the analysis. The vertical axis separates governance levels in the conventional way: a macro level of Party resolutions, laws and national strategies; a meso level of sectoral instruments issued by MOET; and a micro level of rules made by individual universities about teaching, assessment and research.

The horizontal axis takes the three dimensions from Chan's (2023) framework, pedagogical, governance and operational. Crossing the axes gives nine cells, and each instrument was coded into one or more of them by the level at which it operates and the dimension it addresses. The purpose is diagnostic. A matrix of this kind allows the analysis to say where provision is dense, where it thins, and where nothing exists, instead of asserting a gap in general terms. Li et al.'s (2026) typology of state and institution relations is brought in later, in the Discussion, to place the resulting pattern against other systems.

Analysis Procedure

Coding followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase reflexive thematic approach, adapted for documentary material. Each document was read in full and summarised on a standard extraction sheet recording issuing body, date, legal status, scope, stated objectives, addressees, and any obligation bearing on higher education. Codes were generated inductively from these summaries and then arranged against the matrix. Reviewing the themes meant re-reading each instrument against the emerging structure, with particular attention to instruments that would not sit comfortably in any cell, since those tended to mark boundary problems in the field itself. Ambiguity about whether an instrument covered higher education was recorded rather than resolved, and is reported in the Findings. Coding was carried out by the authors without an independent second coder, so the matrix in Table 2 should be read as a structured interpretation rather than a reliability-tested instrument. The criteria applied were that a cell counts as strong where an instrument creates enforceable duties, moderate where it sets

targets or curriculum requirements without enforcement machinery, weak where it states principle only, and absent where no instrument addresses the cell at all.

Limitations

Institutional absence is the most consequential claim in this paper and the most qualified. The micro-level analysis rests on published scholarship and publicly available institutional documents, and Vietnamese universities do not systematically publish internal academic regulations. What can be established is the state of the public record, and that is how the claim is stated throughout.

Several central instruments, MOET's Strategy for the Application of AI in the Education Sector by 2030 and the higher education competency framework among them, were drafts during the study period, and final texts may differ. Documentary analysis establishes what policy requires and not what practice does, and the empirical literature reviewed above suggests the distance between the two is considerable. The authors also read Vietnamese policy from inside the Vietnamese context, which helps with interpretive access and carries the corresponding risk of treating familiar arrangements as self-evident; the comparative framework is used partly as a check on that.

Findings

The Macro Layer: A Dense and Fast-Moving National Architecture

Between June 2020 and March 2026, Viet Nam issued a connected sequence of instruments that carried AI from a sectoral technology interest to a national priority with statutory backing. Table 1 lists those bearing on higher education.

Table 1

Principal Vietnamese policy instruments bearing on AI in higher education, 2020 to 2026

Date	Instrument	Issuing body	Relevance to higher education
3 Jun 2020	Decision No. 749/QĐ-TTg, National Digital Transformation Programme to 2025, orientation to 2030 (Prime Minister of Viet Nam, 2020)	Prime Minister	Identifies education as a priority sector for digital transformation
26 Jan 2021	Decision No. 127/QĐ-TTg, National Strategy on Research, Development and Application of AI to 2030	Prime Minister	Targets AI course integration into university and college curricula; assigns tasks to 15 ministries
18 May 2021	Circular No. 09/2021/TT-BGDDT	MOET	Management and organisation of online teaching

20 Jul 2021	Circular 22/2021/TT-BGDDT	No.	MOET	Student assessment at secondary level
25 Jan 2022	Decision 131/QD-TTg, Enhancing IT Application and Digital Transformation in Education and Training 2022 to 2025 (Prime Minister of Viet Nam, 2022a)	No.	Prime Minister	Builds digital education infrastructure enabling later AI application
11 May 2022	Decision 569/QD-TTg, Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation Development to 2030 (Prime Minister of Viet Nam, 2022b)	No.	Prime Minister	Positions universities as research performers
22 Dec 2024	Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW		Politburo	Sets top-three ASEAN target in AI R&D by 2030; elevates AI to breakthrough priority
9 Jan 2025	Resolution 03/NQ-CP, Government Action Programme	No.	Government	Implements Resolution 57
24 Feb 2025	Circular 02/2025/TT-BGDDT, Digital Competency Framework for Learners	No.	MOET	Six domains, one dedicated to AI; first binding instrument addressing ethical AI use by learners
1 Apr 2025	Resolution 71/NQ-CP	No.	Government	Revises and updates the Action Programme
30 Apr 2025	Resolution No. 66-NQ/TW (Politburo of the Communist		Politburo	Prioritises legislation on AI

4 May 2025	Party of Viet Nam, 2025a) Resolution No. 68-NQ/TW (Politburo of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, 2025b)	Politburo	and other non-traditional issues Private economy; legal framework for AI-based business models
14 Jun 2025	Law on Digital Technology Industry, No. 71/2025/QH15 (in force 1 Jan 2026)	National Assembly	First statutory AI provisions; risk-based approach; content labelling
22 Aug 2025	Resolution No. 71-NQ/TW (Politburo of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, 2025c)	Politburo	Breakthrough in education and training; STEAM orientation
2025 (draft)	Strategy for the Application of AI in the Education Sector by 2030	MOET	Sector-wide AI strategy covering higher education; targets for students, teachers, managers
10 Dec 2025	Law No. 134/2025/QH15 on Artificial Intelligence (in force 1 Mar 2026)	National Assembly	Three-tier risk classification; provider and deployer duties; education-sector compliance from 1 Sep 2027

Compression is the first thing to notice. Four Politburo resolutions bearing on AI appeared within eight months across 2024 and 2025, followed by two statutes inside six months. Few middle-income systems have moved from no binding AI law to a standalone risk-tiered statute that quickly.

What the sequence does with education is a separate matter. Decision No. 127/QD-TTg (Prime Minister of Viet Nam, 2021) reaches higher education through curriculum, directing that AI courses be integrated into university and college programmes. Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW reaches it through research output and talent supply. Both are answering the question of how education can supply AI capability to the economy. How AI changes education's own practices of teaching and certification is a different question, and not the one these instruments were written to address.

Law No. 134/2025/QH15 alters the legal position without altering that framing. It sorts AI systems into high, medium and low risk tiers, requires providers to self-classify and notify the Ministry of Science and Technology before deploying medium or high-risk systems, imposes risk assessment, human oversight, national database registration and incident reporting on high-risk systems, and requires labelling of AI-generated images, video and audio. Its

addressees are providers and deployers. A university that procures an AI system for admissions screening, proctoring or learning analytics is a deployer and falls within the statute. A university whose students use a commercial chatbot to draft an assignment does not, because the deployer in that transaction is the platform operator and the university's interest is academic rather than regulatory. The Law reaches institutional procurement and leaves the commonest form of campus generative AI use outside its addressee structure altogether.

The Meso Layer: Competency Frameworks Aimed at Schools

Circular No. 02/2025/TT-BGDDT of 24 February 2025 established the National Digital Competency Framework for Learners and is the central sectoral instrument (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025a). Six competency domains, one of them given to AI, and for the first time an explicit concern with learners' ability to understand, use, and ethically and responsibly evaluate AI tools, drawing on UNESCO's guidance (UNESCO, 2025). It applies across the education system and it binds. Embedding AI ethics in a normative instrument rather than an exhortation is not a small achievement.

Its scope, though, is set by what kind of instrument it is. The Circular specifies competencies learners should acquire. It does not specify duties institutions must discharge, procedures they must operate, or rules they must enforce. This is a curriculum standard rather than a governance instrument, and it distributes its obligations to programme designers, not to examination boards, academic integrity committees or research ethics panels.

Companion instruments tilt further towards schools. When UNESCO's assessment was prepared, MOET was finalising a Digital and AI Competency Framework for Teachers and Education Managers covering K to 12 formal and continuing education, while the equivalents for technical and vocational education and for higher education were, in the report's own wording, being planned (UNESCO, 2025, p. 51). The Viet Nam National Institute of Educational Sciences had separately drafted AI competency frameworks for school students and school teachers with UNICEF support, drawing on UNESCO's global frameworks, to guide the development of AI subjects from grade 1 to grade 12. For schools, in other words, the sectoral apparatus is well built. For universities, during the period studied, it had not been issued.

The draft Strategy for the Application of AI in the Education Sector by 2030 (Ministry of Education and Training, 2025b) would close that gap. Its documented content spans every level of education with an age-appropriate approach and puts particular weight on higher and vocational education as the route to a high-quality workforce for digital transformation. It emphasises AI ethics, compliance with privacy and data protection rules, and equitable access for women, persons with disabilities and ethnic minorities. Its 2030 targets are specific: all school students equipped to use AI responsibly and creatively, 80% of teachers able to apply AI in lesson planning, grading and progress tracking, all educational administrators supported by AI decision systems, and 80% of educational data digitised and analysed by AI.

The strategy stayed in draft throughout the study period, so the sector's most higher-education-relevant AI instrument was not in force during the Law's grace period. And its quantified targets are again written for school students, teachers and administrators. Higher education appears at the level of purpose, as workforce development, rather than as a measurable institutional obligation.

The Micro Layer: An Empty Cell

Nothing in the public record indicates a systematic body of institutional generative AI policy in Vietnamese universities. What was searched should be stated plainly: the peer-reviewed literature described above, and such academic regulations as individual institutions publish. No systematic audit of university websites was attempted, and the finding is

correspondingly a finding about published evidence rather than about what every institution holds internally.

Evidence for this is indirect but consistent. Nguyen et al. (2026) examined institutional documents at Hanoi Metropolitan University alongside their survey of 156 lecturers and interviews with 20 faculty, and found use and institutional support sharply separated: 67.9% of lecturers had experimented with AI tools, 12.8% used them daily in teaching, and 15.4% had received formal institutional training, against 89.1% who wanted it. Of those numbers, the training figure carries the governance weight. Training is the operational dimension of institutional policy in Chan's (2023) terms, and it is the dimension most readily visible from outside an institution. A university that has not trained its staff has very probably not issued the rules that training would exist to explain.

Work on academic integrity converges on the same picture from a different direction. Vietnamese students show solid general awareness of plagiarism conventions and real uncertainty about how those conventions apply to generated text, and the studies conclude by calling for institutional guidelines, AI literacy provision and assessment redesign. Across the Vietnamese empirical corpus reviewed here, no publication reported the content of a university-level generative AI policy and none evaluated the implementation of one.

Table 2 sets out the resulting distribution.

Table 2

Coverage of AI governance in Vietnamese higher education by level and dimension

Level		Pedagogical dimension	Governance dimension	Operational dimension
Macro (Party, National Assembly, Prime Minister)		Moderate: curriculum integration mandated (Decision 127); STEAM orientation (Resolution 71-NQ/TW)	Strong: risk tiers, provider and deployer duties, content labelling (Law 134/2025/QH15); ethics principles in resolutions	Moderate: infrastructure and data programmes (Decisions 749, 131)
Meso (MOET)		Moderate: AI competency domain for learners (Circular 02/2025); draft sector strategy	Weak: ethics stated as principle; no procedural rules for institutions; HE framework not issued	Weak: teacher framework for K to 12 only; no HE staff development mandate
Micro (universities)		Absent in public record	Absent in public record	Weak: 15.4% of surveyed faculty formally trained (Nguyen et al., 2026)

Provision is densest at the macro level and in the governance dimension, thins through the meso level, and approaches zero at the micro level. That is the level at which generative AI is used.

Four Governance Gaps

Reading the matrix against the research questions isolates four problems, each of which sits in a different place.

Scope comes first. Circular No. 02/2025/TT-BGDDT binds and it addresses AI ethics, but it regulates learner competencies rather than institutional conduct, and MOET's higher-education-specific framework was not issued during the study period. The one enforceable sectoral AI instrument is aimed at the wrong party for the governance problem in question.

Translation is the second. Viet Nam has committed itself to AI ethics repeatedly and at the highest level, and UNESCO's assessment ranks integrating AI ethics into education and training as a high-priority recommendation for 2025 to 2030 (UNESCO, 2025). Those commitments have not become role-specific institutional obligations. What appears here at national scale is the pattern Jobin et al. (2019) documented globally, where convergence on principle sits alongside divergence and inaction on implementation, and it bears out the concern Nguyen et al. (2023) raised about operationalising AI ethics in education.

Assessment is the third problem, and the most serious. No instrument at any level governs the use of generative AI in coursework, theses, examinations or research publication. Decision No. 127/QĐ-TTg treats higher education as a site of AI curriculum delivery; the AI Law treats it as a deployment environment; neither treats it as a site of assessment integrity. Circulars 09/2021 and 22/2021 cover online teaching and secondary assessment and predate generative AI entirely. Instruments like the AI Assessment Scale (Perkins et al., 2024) exist and have been adopted widely elsewhere, and nothing in the Vietnamese framework requires, recommends or enables a domestic equivalent.

Capacity comes last, and determines whether any of the rest can operate. The 15.4% training figure reported by Nguyen et al. (2026) comes from a single institution and cannot be generalised to the sector on its own. Taken with the absence of any institutional AI training mandate at meso level, though, it indicates that if rules were issued tomorrow the academic staff expected to apply them in assessment design and integrity adjudication would largely be doing so unprepared. MOET's teacher AI competency framework, which is the instrument that would address this, covers K to 12.

Discussion

The analysis set out to map Vietnamese AI policy as it applies to higher education, test how far it reaches institutions, and identify what should be built before September 2027. Five points follow.

First, speed of national policy-making and depth of institutional governance turn out to be separate achievements. Viet Nam went from no AI statute to a comprehensive risk-tiered law inside five years, with a coherence UNESCO's assessment commended, and the gradient in Table 2 shows that this did not propagate downward. Reading national regulatory activity as evidence of sectoral readiness would be a mistake. Ball et al. (2012) put the general case: policy is enacted rather than implemented, remade by the institutions receiving it, and where those institutions lack either the capacity or the mandate to remake it, it does not arrive at all.

Second, the gap has a structural cause and is not simply a delay that time will fix. Vietnamese instruments frame AI in education consistently as a workforce question. Decision No. 127/QĐ-TTg directs AI courses into curricula, Resolution No. 57-NQ/TW sets research and talent targets, and the draft education strategy emphasises higher and vocational education as the route to a workforce for digital transformation. Through Bacchi's (2009) lens, this constitutes the problem as one of supply, and problems constituted that way generate obligations for

curriculum designers and none for examiners. The assessment gap is not an oversight in an otherwise complete design. It is what that framing produces.

Third, Viet Nam does not fit any of the three patterns Li et al. (2026) identified. It shares the centralised, government-led orientation they found in Chinese institutions and the ethics-forward, government-aligned posture they found in Japanese ones. It differs from both because its institutional layer is not merely derivative of state direction but, on the public record, largely unwritten. The American pattern of faculty autonomy and adaptable local policy is absent, and so is a developed centralised institutional model. State-led but institutionally thin describes the configuration better: strong direction at the top, weak rule-making capacity where delivery happens. Other middle-income systems that have recently legislated on AI are likely to look similar, and the comparative literature has not yet named the type.

Fourth, the eighteen-month grace period under Law No. 134/2025/QH15 (National Assembly of Viet Nam, 2025b) is better read as an opportunity with a deadline than as a reprieve. Granting education, health and finance longer than other sectors implies legislative recognition that they need preparation time. Preparation needs an addressee, though, and the sectoral instruments that would tell universities what to prepare for were still draft or still planned. If they arrive late in the window, institutions will have neither the time nor the staff to build compliant internal systems before September 2027, and the capacity gap makes this worse, since a training deficit of the size reported cannot be closed quickly.

Fifth, institutional policy should be designed around the cells that are actually empty rather than restating national principles. On scope, universities need not wait for a higher education competency framework before issuing rules of conduct, since competency standards and conduct rules are different instruments doing different work and the absence of one does not preclude the other. On translation, ethical commitments should be written as obligations attaching to named functions, the examination board, the thesis supervisor, the research ethics panel, rather than as declarations, because both Jobin et al. (2019) and Nguyen et al. (2023) indicate that unallocated principles do not bind. On assessment, the operable unit is the task, which argues for a declared-level approach of the kind the AI Assessment Scale sets out (Perkins et al., 2024), with disclosure rather than detection as the primary mechanism, following Cotton et al. (2024). On capacity, staff development belongs before the policy rather than after it, and the 89.1% of surveyed faculty wanting such training indicates demand that is simply not being met.

One further implication concerns Viet Nam's international commitments. UNESCO's Guidance (2023) places a duty on educational institutions to validate generative AI systems before deploying them with students. Viet Nam's competency framework drew on UNESCO's work, and the AI Law imposes employer obligations that partly overlap with that duty. Yet the validation duty remains unassigned in Vietnamese higher education, because no instrument names the body inside a university that must perform it. Closing that particular hole would align the institutional layer with the international guidance and the domestic statute simultaneously, and it is among the more tractable items on the agenda before September 2027.

Conclusion

Vietnamese AI policy, read as a connected architecture, is strong where it is furthest from the classroom. Analysis of thirty-one screened instruments, sixteen of them bearing directly on higher education, set against the empirical literature on Vietnamese universities, found a macro layer that is dense, fast-moving and internally coherent, culminating in Law No. 134/2025/QH15. The meso layer is competency-focused and built for schools, with the higher education

instruments still draft or still planned during the study period. The micro layer, where teaching, assessment and supervision happen, is effectively empty in the public record.

Each of the four gaps is specific. The one binding sectoral AI instrument regulates learner competencies instead of institutional conduct. Repeated national ethical commitments have not become anyone's particular duty. Nothing at any level governs generative AI in coursework, theses or examinations. And a formal training rate of 15.4% among surveyed faculty at one institution suggests that the staff who would operate any new rules are not equipped to do so.

The paper offers a consolidated mapping of Vietnamese AI policy instruments as they bear on higher education, which the searches conducted here suggest is the first of its kind. It extends the comparative typology of state and institution relations by identifying a state-led but institutionally thin configuration that work drawn from the United States, Japan and China does not describe. And it turns the diagnosis into four design principles: issue conduct rules without waiting for competency frameworks, write ethics as role-specific obligation, govern assessment at the level of the task through declared permission and disclosure, and treat staff development as a precondition rather than a consequence.

Limits bear repeating. Claims of institutional absence are claims about the public record, and Vietnamese universities do not routinely publish internal academic regulations. Several central instruments were drafts. Documentary analysis establishes what policy requires rather than what practice does. These point towards the work that should come next: institutional case studies with access to internal regulations, and survey research on how Vietnamese academic staff actually adjudicate generative AI use in assessment. Either could qualify the account given here.

What the analysis does establish is a question of timing. Viet Nam has built a national framework of genuine quality at unusual speed and given its education sector until 1 September 2027 to comply with it. What remains to be done is institutional work, and there is a fixed amount of time left to do it in.

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