



The Role of Local Educational Management in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the critical role of local educational management in Vietnam, with a particular focus on how provincial-level authorities implement national education policies in practice through school network planning, resource allocation, and teacher deployment. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative document analysis with descriptive analysis of official statistics published by the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Finance. To capture regional variation in governance capacity and educational demand, the study contrasts two major metropolitan centers, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, with two large North Central provinces, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An, where broader rural and mountainous contexts create distinct challenges in access and resource distribution. The findings reveal a clear divide between large metropolitan centers and territorially extensive provinces. Major cities face rapid enrollment growth, higher staffing pressures, and intensified demand for educational services, while large provinces confront persistent infrastructure gaps, dispersed settlement patterns, and access inequalities, particularly in rural and mountainous areas. Fiscal analysis further indicates uneven local spending capacity across regions, alongside persistent limitations in data integration and reporting consistency within subnational education administration.

KEYWORDS:

Local educational management; Education governance; Public administration; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Human resource development through education and training plays a pivotal role in shaping a country's urbanization trajectory and economic growth. In the context of Vietnam's ongoing education reform, local-level education management is crucial for translating central government directions and national education policies into concrete outcomes at educational institutions in each locality. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issues national standards, the general education curriculum, and overarching policy orientations; meanwhile, provincial and district education authorities, together with schools, are responsible for implementation, supervision, and context-sensitive adjustment in accordance with local socio-economic conditions, cultural characteristics, and available resources. Local education is an essential component of the 2018 General Education Curriculum, enabling students to

understand the historical traditions, cultural heritage, socio-economic conditions, and natural environment of their home localities, thereby fostering attachment to their homeland, civic responsibility, and the capacity to act appropriately in real-world contexts (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018). According to MOET Official Dispatch No. 5982/BGDĐT-GDTrH (2008), the program is designed to be flexible and tailored to each locality's specific conditions, thereby strengthening school-community linkages, promoting local values, and mobilizing social stakeholders to participate in education. However, the very requirement that local education remain locally adaptive also places high demands on management, ranging from content planning and staff assignment to organizing experiential learning activities, coordinating with external agencies and community partners, and ensuring the enabling conditions for implementation. In practice, local organizational capacity and resources are uneven; differences in population size, levels of urbanization, and educational demand across localities generate distinct management challenges, directly affecting the quality and stability of local education implementation.

A substantial body of research has underscored the importance of place-based education and local curricula in

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fostering civic dispositions, enhancing community connectedness, and promoting learning rooted in authentic contexts. Wang, L et al. (2019) argue that school- and community-based curriculum development is an interactive process among teachers, learners, and the broader social context, in which contextual relevance and community participation are crucial conditions for integrating the curriculum into everyday learning practices. Greany et al. (2024) propose a conceptual framework of “local learning landscapes” in decentralized education systems, underscoring that the effective operation of locally situated educational practices depends not only on classroom- or school-level initiatives but also on system-level governance design to strengthen coherence, quality, and equity across local support networks. Kizys et al. (2025) describe a place-based professional development model in which teachers collaborate with school counselors and community partners to design project-based learning (PBL) aligned with local needs and resources; early findings indicate relatively strong mobilization of community assets, though sustained support is still needed to consolidate assessment practices and scale implementation quality. These approaches consistently emphasize openness, community embeddedness, and learner-centered knowledge construction, while also indicating that implementation governance is a key determinant of whether flexible curricula achieve their intended outcomes.

In Vietnam, research on local education has attracted attention in both theoretical and practical terms. Danh (2023) highlights the local education system’s contributions to developing civic competencies, supporting career orientation, and strengthening connections between schools and local communities. Several recent studies (Thống et al, 2023; Hào and Thống, 2024) suggest that local education management in some areas remains limited in terms of planning, implementation, organization, and assessment, resulting in uneven and sometimes unstable outcomes. Nôn et al. (2024) examine the management of local education activities for primary school students in Vi Thuy district, Hau Giang province, using survey data and descriptive statistics to clarify differences in implementation across content domains (culture, history, geography, socio-economics, career orientation, ideological–moral education, and the environment). Their findings reveal substantial variation in implementation intensity, organizational forms, and students’ interest across domains, reflecting distinctive community conditions and the need for management adjustments tailored to regional realities.

Nevertheless, existing studies still lack analyses that systematically clarify regional differences in local education implementation by combining qualitative document analysis with descriptive analyses of official data sources. At the same time, differences in population size, urbanization levels, and educational demand create a diversified landscape of organizational arrangements, resource prioritization, and management challenges across localities; therefore,

comparing provinces and cities with distinct development conditions can help identify both system-level issues and locality-specific bottlenecks. Addressing this gap, the present study employs qualitative document analysis and descriptive analysis of publicly available statistics published by MOET and provincial Departments of Education and Training. To illustrate regional diversity, the study reviews official statistics from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Thanh Hoa, and Nghe An. These localities were selected for three reasons. First, they represent key regions of Vietnam, with Hanoi in the North, Ho Chi Minh City in the South, and Thanh Hoa and Nghe An in the North Central region. Second, they capture contrasting urbanization and demographic dynamics: Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City face concentrated and rapidly changing educational demand, while Thanh Hoa and Nghe An manage more dispersed rural and mountainous populations with access constraints. Third, they reflect differences in management capacity and resource conditions, which allows the study to compare how local authorities respond to distinct pressures in school network planning, resource allocation, and teacher deployment. Based on the identified gaps and objectives, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How do differences in population scale, urbanization, and territorial conditions across provinces shape local educational management in terms of school network planning, resource allocation, and teacher deployment?
2. What implications do these differences have for improving the effectiveness and equity of local education governance in Vietnam?

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In examining the role and effectiveness of local education, scholars have advanced multiple perspectives and analytical approaches. The theory of decentralization, articulated by Rondinelli, Nellis, and Cheema (1983), conceptualizes decentralization as the transfer of a portion of decision-making authority, responsibilities, and resources from the central government to lower administrative levels. Within the education sector, Bray (1999) further differentiates decentralization into forms such as administrative deconcentration, delegation, and substantive devolution to local authorities, while also highlighting potential consequences for equity, efficiency, and cross-locality disparities in institutional capacity. Rhodes (1996) develops the network governance perspective in public service delivery, arguing that contemporary governance increasingly operates through interdependent networks of organizations rather than solely through hierarchical control. Building on this orientation, Osborne (2010) systematizes the “new public governance” paradigm, emphasizing multi-actor coordination and the co-creation of public value. Applied to education, this governance lens enables analysis of how provincial and district education authorities, schools,

teachers, parents, and community institutions coordinate to create enabling conditions for the enactment of local curricula in practice.

Empirical studies applying these theoretical orientations consistently underscore the centrality of implementation processes and stakeholder coordination. Chen et al. (2015), in their study of school- and community-based curriculum development, demonstrate that classroom enactment depends substantially on interactions among teachers, learners, and the broader social context, thereby reinforcing a network governance logic in which coordination and shared understanding among stakeholders shape the extent to which curricular intentions are realized. Heikkilä (2021) similarly finds that teachers' participation and professional agency in local curriculum development are decisive determinants of implementation quality. More recently, Kizys et al. (2025) describe a place-based professional development model that integrates project-based learning with community partners; while the model facilitates the productive mobilization of community resources, the authors also emphasize the need for sustained, long-term support to strengthen assessment practices and maintain quality during scaling. These findings suggest that evaluating the role and effectiveness of GDĐP requires simultaneous attention to the degree of decentralization, mechanisms for multi-actor coordination, and the pivotal role of frontline practitioners under conditions of uneven local resources.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study selects Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Thanh Hoa, and Nghe An to capture meaningful and policy-relevant variation in Vietnam's local educational management across regions and administrative contexts. First, the four cases provide clear geographic and regional representation: Hanoi anchors the North, Ho Chi Minh City represents the South, and Thanh Hoa and Nghe An are large provinces in the North Central region, allowing the analysis to reflect differences in territorial conditions and development patterns that shape education governance. Second, the cases embody contrasting urbanization and demographic dynamics that directly affect school network planning and teacher deployment. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are highly urbanized growth poles that attract internal migration and experience strong, often rapidly changing educational demand, creating intense pressure on school capacity, staffing, and service quality. In contrast, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An are extensive provinces with more heterogeneous rural-urban structures, including remote and disadvantaged areas, where management challenges are more strongly associated with spatial access, intra-provincial disparities, and the logistics of allocating resources across dispersed communities. Third, the selection enables comparison across different governance and capacity environments: large metropolitan systems typically operate with stronger fiscal and administrative capacity but face scale and congestion pressures, whereas large rural provinces must

balance efficiency-oriented consolidation with equity and access goals under more complex geographic constraints.

The study combines qualitative document analysis with descriptive analysis of official statistics. Data are collected from publicly available sources published by the Ministry of Education and Training and the provincial Departments of Education and Training in the selected localities. To evaluate the role and effectiveness of local education, prior research and international indicator frameworks commonly rely on a set of comparable, system-level measures that capture implementation capacity and resource distribution. In particular, education indicator frameworks emphasize descriptive metrics, such as the scale of the school network, teacher availability, and workload, measured through student-teacher ratios, as well as public expenditure on education, as core inputs for assessing governance performance and equity (OECD, 2021; World Bank Group, 2025). Accordingly, this study also utilizes descriptive indicators, including the number of general education schools, the average number of students per teacher, and local government education spending, to examine how local educational management influences planning, allocation, and delivery across the selected provinces and cities. The findings are presented through tables and visual summaries to enable a clear comparative depiction of current conditions across localities, thereby supporting assessment and the development of policy implications to enhance management effectiveness.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 highlights the apparent differences between the two groups of localities in terms of scale and school network planning over the five years from 2019 to 2024. In the two major metropolitan areas, the number of general education schools shows an upward trend. Hanoi recorded increases across all three levels (from 754 to 777 primary schools; 610 to 631 lower secondary schools; and 196 to 201 upper secondary schools). Ho Chi Minh City increased the number of primary and lower secondary schools (from 500 to 528 and from 275 to 289, respectively), while the number of upper secondary schools remained unchanged at 123. This expansion reflects strong growth in educational demand in the context of urbanization, implying that local education management must be more proactive in school network planning, capital allocation, and workforce deployment to ensure both adequate system capacity and the quality of educational services.

By contrast, Thanh Hoa and Nghe An exhibit a declining trend in the number of schools at the lower levels, particularly at the primary and lower secondary levels. Thanh Hoa decreased from 641 primary schools to 580 and from 594 lower secondary schools to 533, while the number of upper secondary schools remained stable at 86. Nghe An decreased from 522 primary schools to 480 and from 377 lower secondary schools to 361, with a slight decline in upper

secondary schools from 88 to 87. These patterns are consistent with efforts to consolidate, streamline, and restructure school networks in provinces with large territories and diverse regional conditions, aiming to optimize resource

utilization. Such restructuring may improve the efficiency of budget and staffing utilization; however, it also raises a key governance challenge in terms of managing the risk of unequal access, especially in rural and disadvantaged areas.

Table 1. Number of General Education Schools by Province, 2019–2024

Year	Province	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
2019	Hanoi	754	610	196
	Thanh Hoa	641	594	86
	Nghe An	522	377	88
	Ho Chi Minh City	500	275	123
2024	Hanoi	777	631	201
	Thanh Hoa	580	533	86
	Nghe An	480	361	87
	Ho Chi Minh City	528	289	123

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO)

Figure 1 presents this contrast using the share of permanent classrooms as a proxy indicator (preliminary 2024–2025). The two major metropolitan areas report almost universal coverage, with Ho Chi Minh City at 99.97% and Hanoi at 98.87%, suggesting stronger fiscal space, better access to investment resources, and more consistent implementation of facility upgrading programs. By comparison, Thanh Hoa records 94.24%, indicating a lower but still relatively high level of infrastructure consolidation, whereas Nghe An is substantially lower at 88.94%,

suggesting a more persistent infrastructure deficit. This gap is particularly meaningful for large provinces with diverse geography and dispersed settlements, where upgrading and maintaining school facilities can be more costly and logistically complex. The figures suggest that local education management influences not only day-to-day implementation but also the prioritization, coordination, and monitoring of infrastructure investments, which in turn shape the safety, continuity, and equity of learning conditions, particularly for rural and disadvantaged communities.

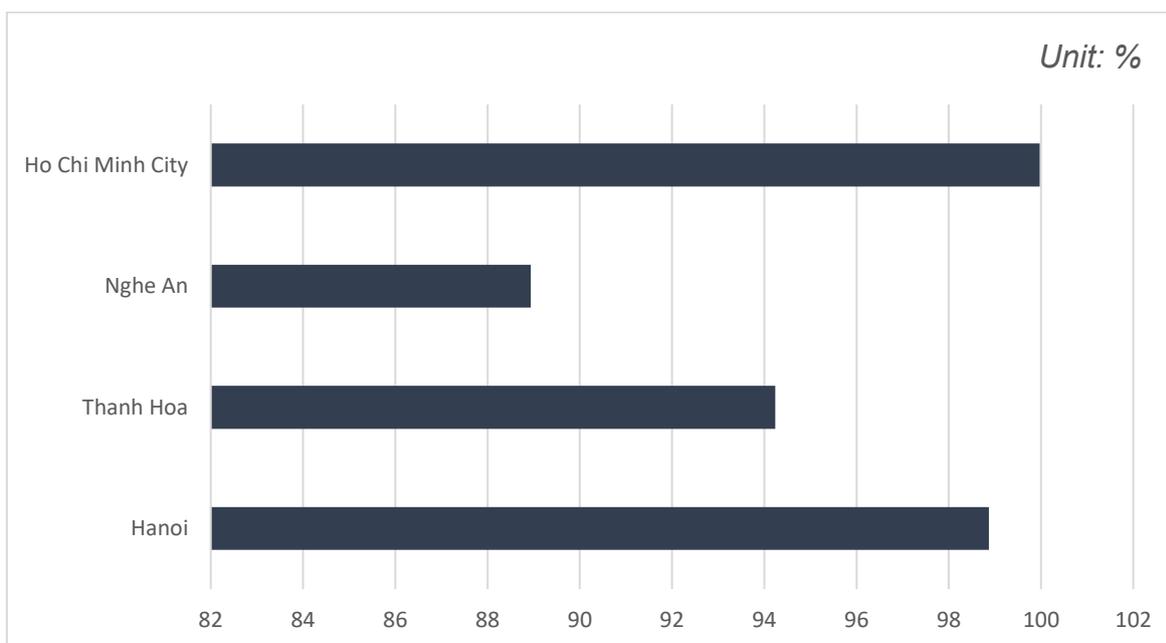


Figure 1. Proportion of Permanent Classrooms by Province, 2024–2025

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO)

Table 2 shows that Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi dominate both the teacher workforce and student intake: Ho

Chi Minh City reports 12,323 teachers and 312,830 newly admitted students, while Hanoi has 12,109 teachers and

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246,097 newly admitted students. By comparison, the two large rural provinces operate at a much smaller scale, with Nghe An reporting 2,260 teachers and 50,078 entrants, and Thanh Hoa reporting 1,801 teachers and 37,081 entrants. These differences suggest that local education management in major urban centers must address the rapid and high-volume demand for vocational pathways by ensuring sufficient staffing, facilities, and coordination with labor market stakeholders. At the same time, rural provinces face a

distinct challenge: expanding access and strengthening capacity to support local employment better and reduce regional disparities through vocational education. In this sense, the table highlights how local governance influences both the allocation of human resources and the planning of training provision, with urban systems prioritizing the management of scale and rural systems focusing on closing gaps in coverage and opportunity.

Table 2. Teachers and Students in Vocational Education by Province, 2023

Province	Teachers	Newly Admitted Students
Hanoi	12,109	246,097
Thanh Hoa	1,801	37,081
Nghe An	2,260	50,078
Ho Chi Minh City	12,323	312,830

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO)

Table 3 provides a direct proxy for the efficiency and equity of teacher deployment, because the average number of students per teacher reflects how effectively local systems allocate and distribute teaching staff across school levels. In 2024, the two metropolitan areas operate with relatively high student–teacher ratios at the primary and lower secondary levels: Hanoi (26.75; 26.56) and Ho Chi Minh City (26.52; 26.40). This pattern is consistent with intense enrolment pressure in urban settings. It suggests that local education management in these cities must continuously balance rapid demand growth with teacher recruitment, assignment, and workload management. At the upper secondary level, however, the ratios become more differentiated, with Hanoi at 23.70. At the same time, Ho Chi Minh City is notably lower at 20.46, indicating different planning choices and staffing distributions between the two urban systems.

In the two large provinces, the ratios are generally lower than in the cities at the primary and lower secondary levels, but the more critical signal lies in how ratios vary by level, which points to differences in deployment strategy and constraints. Thanh Hoa (24.74; 24.91; 20.64) maintains comparatively lower ratios overall, whereas Nghe An (25.98; 24.87; 22.13) is closer to the urban levels at primary but lower at lower secondary. These patterns suggest that local governance influences not only the total number of teachers but also the within-province distribution of teachers by level and the ability to respond to demographic and geographic realities. From a management perspective, student differences–teacher ratios can reflect varying degrees of administrative capacity, recruitment flexibility, and the effectiveness of data-informed planning.

Table 3. Average Number of Students per Teacher by Province, 2024

Province	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary
Hanoi	26.75	26.56	23.70
Thanh Hoa	24.74	24.91	20.64
Nghe An	25.98	24.87	22.13
Ho Chi Minh City	26.52	26.40	20.46

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO)

Table 4 highlights how differences in local fiscal capacity and budgeting choices shape the resource base for education management, and it also points to the practical governance constraints of incomplete and inconsistent reporting. In absolute terms, Hanoi records the largest education and training expenditures for 2019–2021 (22 billion in 2019 to 23 billion in 2021), indicating strong spending capacity and a potentially greater ability to finance

school network expansion, staffing needs, and infrastructure upgrading; however, the missing 2022 value limits trend interpretation. Ho Chi Minh City experienced a dip in 2020 (13 billion), followed by a recovery and increase through 2022 (16 billion), indicating active fiscal adjustment and re-prioritization of funding for education services during a volatile period. In the two large provinces, Thanh Hoa displays a clear upward trajectory from 2019 to 2022 (8

billion to 11 billion), consistent with a strengthening investment effort. In contrast, Nghe An remains around the 9.3–9.5 range in 2019–2020 before declining in 2021 (8 billion), with 2022 not reported in the table. From a governance perspective, these patterns support the discussion that local education management in Vietnam continues to face budget constraints and uneven administrative capacity. Large cities must manage scale and rapid demand while incurring high expenditure volumes, whereas provinces must balance

expanding access with reducing regional disparities within a tighter fiscal space. At the same time, the presence of missing entries and potential formatting differences underscores the challenge of limited data integration and standardization, reinforcing the need to strengthen local governance capacity not only in planning and allocation, but also in data systems that enable consistent monitoring of spending adequacy and efficiency across provinces.

Table 4. Local Government Expenditure on Education and Training, 2019–2022

Unit: VND Billion

Province	2019	2020	2021	2022
Hanoi	22.028.366	25.871.815	23.823.839	-
Ho Chi Minh City	15.055.366	13.567.154	14.930.929	16.170.862
Nghe An	9.314.811.000	9.467.331	8.662.356	-
Thanh Hoa	8.766.791	9.291.546	10.762.847	11.158.148

Source: Ministry of Finance

5. CONCLUSION

Local educational management is a cornerstone of Vietnam’s education system because it determines how national policies are translated into concrete outcomes through resource allocation, school network planning, and teacher deployment. This study combines qualitative document analysis with descriptive analysis of official statistics published by the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Finance, using Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Thanh Hoa, and Nghe An as illustrative cases of regional diversity. The results show a clear metropolitan–provincial divide. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City face stronger growth pressures and higher demand, as reflected in the expansion of school networks at key levels and relatively high student–teacher ratios. In contrast, the provincial cases reveal patterns consistent with network restructuring, infrastructure gaps, and smaller-scale vocational education intake. Budget figures further indicate unequal fiscal space across provinces and limitations in reporting completeness, underscoring that local education outcomes depend not only on policy design but also on local governance capacity and data systems.

These patterns can be understood within the broader context of socio-demographic and territorial dynamics. In both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, rapid urbanization and sustained internal migration contribute to rising and shifting student populations, including increasing demand in peri-urban areas. This context requires local authorities to anticipate demographic changes, expand capacity where necessary, and deploy teachers more flexibly across districts and school levels, ensuring that rapid growth does not result in overcrowding or a dilution of quality. At the same time, large provinces such as Thanh Hoa and Nghe An encompass extensive rural areas and mountainous districts, where dispersed settlements and uneven development conditions can lead to persistent access and infrastructure disparities.

Here, local education management must strike a balance between efficiency-oriented network consolidation and equity goals, ensuring that restructuring does not widen access gaps for remote communities. Effective governance in these settings, therefore, depends on mechanisms for differentiated support, targeted investment, and administrative coordination that reflect intra-provincial diversity rather than treating the province as a uniform unit.

Based on these findings, several policy implications can be drawn. First, local governments should strengthen data-informed planning and inter-agency coordination to forecast enrolment trends and guide school network decisions, especially in fast-growing metropolitan belts and in remote rural or mountainous districts. Second, teacher workforce governance should be improved through flexible deployment rules, targeted recruitment and retention policies for difficult areas, and workload management in high-pressure urban schools. Third, fiscal and infrastructure policies should prioritize equity by protecting education budgets, accelerating investments in provinces with lower facility indicators, and adopting transparent criteria for allocating resources across districts. Finally, stronger links between schools and enterprises, particularly in vocational education, can help align training with labor-market needs and convert migration-driven urban growth into a more sustainable human capital advantage. Overall, enhancing local governance capacity, improving integrated data systems, and ensuring equitable resource allocation remain essential to strengthening both efficiency and equity in Vietnam’s education system.

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