

Exploring the Transnational Education Landscape of Vietnam and its Potential for International Cooperation

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KEYWORDS

Vietnam transnational education,
Vietnam higher education landscape,
Vietnam Edtech landscape,
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Vietnam international education cooperation.

ABSTRACT

The Prime Minister has recently issued Decision No. 1705/QĐ-TTg dated December 31, 2024, approving the Education Development Strategy until 2030, with a vision toward 2045. The strategic objective is for Vietnam's education system to achieve an advanced level within the Asian region by 2030 and reach a globally advanced standard by 2045. Transnational education (TNE) plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of this strategy, enhancing educational quality and promoting international integration. This paper synthesizes disparate studies and examines legal documents, policies, and strategic reports, as well as conducts a comprehensive analysis of specific cases. Although TNE in Vietnam has developed over the past 25 years, its scale remains limited compared to its potential and the evolving demands of higher education planning. Adjusting regulatory frameworks and policies, enhancing university autonomy, and expanding international cooperation in education and investment are urgent requirements for TNE to fulfill its intended role within the national education system.

1. Introduction

The concept of "transnational education" (TNE) has evolved significantly over recent decades, reflecting the increasing globalization of higher education. Early scholarly discussions trace back to the late 20th century, focusing on educational programs that transcend national boundaries. A seminal definition by UNESCO and the Council of Europe in 2001 describes TNE as encompassing "all types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services (including those of distance education) in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based" (UNESCO/Council of Europe, 2001). This definition highlights the cross-border nature of TNE,

emphasizing the physical separation between learners and the awarding institutions.

In recent years, the British Council has offered a more focused perspective, defining TNE as situations where "students study towards a foreign qualification without leaving their home country" (Francois, 2016). This contemporary definition underscores the accessibility of international qualifications domestically, facilitated by various delivery models such as online courses, international branch campuses, and collaborative programs between local and foreign institutions. The evolution of TNE reflects a dynamic interplay between global educational demands and the need for accessible, quality higher education across borders.

TNE in Vietnam has undergone significant development since the early 2000s, reflecting the

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country's commitment to international integration in education. The Vietnamese government has established policies and legal frameworks to regulate and promote TNE, such as Decree No.18/2001/ND-GP on the establishment and operation of foreign cultural and educational institutions in Vietnam, and Decree No.86/2018/ND-CP, which provides stricter regulations and tighter control over TNE operations. The rapid growth of TNE in Vietnam has significantly contributed to the country's development, offering more higher education opportunities and choices, especially to the youth. This expansion has led to a diversification of educational programs, with disciplines such as Economics and Management comprising 61.01% of joint training programs, followed by Engineering and Technology at 16.95%, and Social Sciences and Humanities at 8.28% (N. Nguyen & Lee, 2020).

In recent years, Vietnam has aimed to position itself as an international education hub in Southeast Asia. In August 2024, the Politburo issued Conclusion No. 91-KL/TW, emphasizing the promotion of international integration in education and training to meet the requirements of improving human resource quality for national development. This strategic direction underscores Vietnam's ongoing efforts to enhance the quality and competitiveness of its higher education system through transnational collaborations.

In Vietnam, transnational education can be categorized into six primary types of programs or collaborations, namely franchising and validation; collaborative joint/double degree programmes; branch campuses and other transnational and foreign-invested HEIs; advanced training programmes/High-quality programmes; articulation and credit transfer; and distance learning. The pros and cons of those models will be discussed more in details in other sessions of this paper.

Since transnational education is a broad topic requiring extensive in-depth research, this paper focuses solely on available data collected from public publications and previous studies. It also reviews key documents, including policy directives, legal frameworks, and statements from regulatory agencies, as well as research conducted by domestic and international organizations, scholars, and their published works. Based on this synthesis, the paper analyzes the findings to provide an overview and propose some insights, paving the way for more in-depth studies in this field.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Vietnam TNE market scale and development

TNE in Vietnam has evolved over the past 25 years, with a trend towards the gradual liberalization of international education provision. The country has established diverse TNE programs with universities

from various countries, showcasing its commitment to offering diverse educational opportunities. The UK leads with 101 programs, followed by the USA with 59 and France with 53, collectively representing over half of all TNE programs. Asian countries like Korea, China, Malaysia, and others also have a significant presence, offering between 18 and 27 programs each (LLieva et al., 2023).

In the big picture, Vietnam's higher education market is projected to grow by USD 616.5 million, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.6% from 2024 to 2029 (The-shiv, 2025). This expansion is fueled by the increasing adoption of innovative teaching methods and the growing emphasis on internationalization within the education sector. These developments are reshaping higher education, creating new opportunities for both students and institutions. Although the transnational education (TNE) market in Vietnam has experienced significant growth and transformation in recent years, those number is by far below the expectation of targeting Vietnam education as top four in the Asean Market.

To the best of our knowledge, the development of transnational education (TNE) in Vietnam encounters several key obstacles:

- Regulatory and policy constraints: Vietnam's regulatory framework for TNE has been evolving, with policies such as Decree No.18/2001/ND-GP and Decree No.86/2018/ND-CP governing the establishment and operation of foreign educational institutions. These regulations, while aiming to ensure quality and control, can sometimes be perceived as stringent, potentially deterring foreign institutions from establishing partnerships or campuses in Vietnam (Lee & Gough, 2020).

- Quality assurance challenges: Ensuring the quality of TNE programs is a significant concern. The rapid expansion of TNE has, at times, outpaced the development of robust quality assurance mechanisms, leading to inconsistencies in program standards and delivery. This situation is exacerbated when profit-driven motives overshadow educational objectives, potentially compromising academic integrity (Nhan & Le, 2019).

- Financial and resource limitations: many Vietnamese students and families face financial constraints that make accessing TNE programs challenging, especially those with high tuition fees. Additionally, local institutions may lack the necessary resources and infrastructure to support high-quality TNE offerings, limiting the scope and scale of such programs (G. Nguyen & Shillabeer, 2013).

- Language and cultural barriers: English proficiency among Vietnamese students varies, and limited language skills can hinder their ability to engage fully with TNE programs, many of which are delivered in English. Cultural differences in teaching

and learning styles between Vietnamese institutions and their foreign partners can also pose challenges to effective collaboration and student adaptation (N. Nguyen, 2018).

- Limited awareness and perception issues: There may be a lack of awareness or understanding among students and parents about the benefits and opportunities associated with TNE. Concerns about the recognition of foreign qualifications and the relevance of certain programs to the Vietnamese job market can also influence perceptions and decisions regarding TNE (N. Nguyen, 2018).

Addressing these obstacles requires a multifaceted approach; we only summary some previous researchs, collect public information and propose some discussions in this paper.

2.2. Tuition fees and financial obstacles

Franchised and joint degree programs, collectively referred to as joint training programs, are considerably more costly compared to local degrees or high-quality programs. On average, tuition fees for these programs typically range from VND 40 to VND 80 million per year (approximately \$1,500 to \$3,200), with public university programs generally being more affordable than those offered by private institutions.

Some programs have varying fees across different years, with costs escalating notably in the later stages of the program. While most joint training programs with international partners follow a franchised model, Vietnam also offers a limited number of programs where the overseas partner conducts teaching within Vietnam, and these programs do not seem to incur higher costs than franchised programs.

Tuition fees at foreign-invested universities offering overseas degree qualifications are typically much higher than fees for franchised programs at local universities. Their global standing and international environment enable them to charge higher fees compared to local universities' franchised degree courses.

At British University Vietnam, tuition fees vary based on the partner university, with programs granting degrees from Staffordshire University having lower annual fees than those offering degrees from the University of London. Meanwhile, RMIT Vietnam's fees differ primarily by subject, with Bachelor of Engineering programs being notably more affordable per year or per credit compared to the university's business, design, or language programs.

Tuition fees at publicly-supported transnational universities like Vietnamese German University (VGU) are significantly lower than those at the mentioned foreign-invested HEIs and comparable to advanced programs at local institutions.

Intuitively, the average monthly salary for paid workers and employees in Vietnam was about 8.5 million VND in the first quarter of 2024 (Statista, 2025). This equates to an annual income of approximately 102 million VND. Therefore, the annual tuition fees for TNE programs can range from roughly 23% to 157% of the average Vietnamese worker's annual income. This percentage can vary from 67% to 186% if students choose the foreign-invested universities as illustrated the following table.

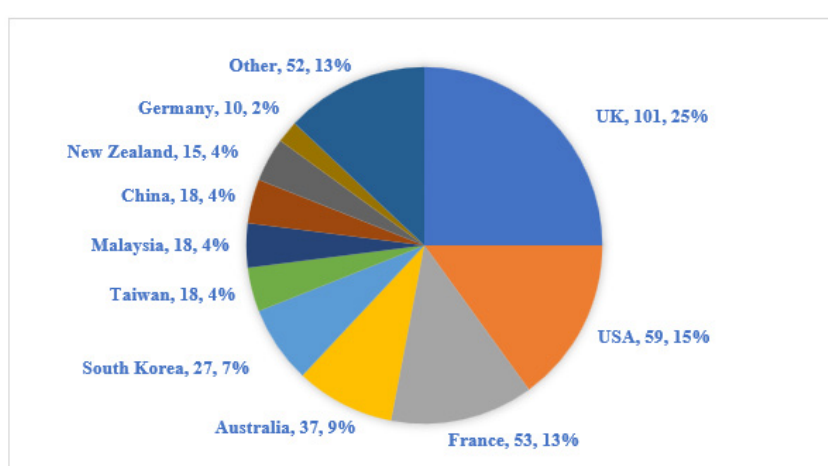
While TNE programs in Vietnam provide a more affordable alternative to studying abroad, the associated tuition fees can still be substantial relative to the average household income. Prospective students

Table 1. Tuition fees for selected franchised and joint degree programmes (in USD) (British Council, 2019)

Partner Institution	Programme	Fees (for Vietnamese citizens)
Foreign Trade University, Hanoi (Public) University of Bedfordshire (UK)	4-year Bachelor of Business Studies (final year in UK)	VND 46.2 Mn per year (Vietnam section of course) (\$1,800)
FPT University (Private)	IT or Business Management - First 2 years (HND programme)	VND 59.6 to 64.6 Mn per year (\$2,300 to \$2,500)
University of Greenwich (UK)	IT or Business Management - One-year top-up to bachelor's degree	VND 109.3 Mn for one year (\$4,300)
Hanoi University (Public) La Trobe University (Australia)	4-year Bachelor of Business Administration (Finance Management and Marketing)	VND 70.4 Mn per year (\$2,800)
Hoa Sen University, HCM (Private) VATEL University (France)	Hoa Sen University, HCMC (Private) VATEL University (France)	VND 78 Mn per year (\$3,100)
University of Economics & Business (Public) Troy University (USA)	4-year Bachelor of Business Management (4 years)	VND 62 Mn per year (\$2,500)
University of Economics & Finance (Public) University of Gloucestershire (UK)	4-year Bachelor of Arts in Business and Marketing Management	VND 74.8 Mn per year (\$2,900)
University of Science and Technology, Hanoi (Public) Various overseas partners (Australia, France, New Zealand)	4- year and 5-year programmes in science, technology and engineering subjects	VND 40 to 45 Mn per year (\$1,500 to \$1,800)

Table 2. Annual tuition fees at selected foreign-invested / transnational HEIs (in USD) (British Council, 2019)

Institution	Programme	Fees (for Vietnamese citizens)
British University Vietnam	Bachelor's degree (Staffordshire programmes)	VND 196 Mn per year (\$7,600)
	Bachelor's degree (University of London programmes)	VND 249 Mn to 265 Mn per year (\$9,700 to \$10,800)
	MBA (University of London, 2-year part time course)	VND 209 Mn per year (\$8,200)
RMIT University Vietnam	3-year bachelor's degree (all subjects except Engineering)	VND 219 Mn to 257 Mn per year (\$8,600 to \$10,010)
	4-year bachelor's degree (Engineering subjects)	VND 145 Mn per year (\$5,600)
	Master's degree	VND 256 Mn to VND 289 Mn per year (\$10,030 to \$11,300)
Vietnamese German University	Bachelor's degree	VND 68 Mn to VND 75 Mn per year (\$2,600 to \$2,900)
	Master's degree	VND 57 Mn to VND 60 Mn per year (\$2,200 to \$2,300)

**Figure 1. Number of TNE programmes in Vietnam by country of origin (2024) (LLieva et al., 2023)**

and their families should carefully assess their financial situation and explore available scholarships and financial aid options to make informed decisions about pursuing transnational education.

2.3. Programs and recognition

Vietnamese TNE programs offer an opportunity for students to access international education without leaving the country, but they face serious challenges in quality assurance, faculty standards, degree recognition, and industry relevance. Without stronger oversight, accreditation reforms, and better industry integration, these programs may continue to struggle with credibility and attractiveness.

Vietnam lacks a comprehensive and unified accreditation system for TNE programs. While the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) provides some regulations, enforcement and monitoring are inconsistent. Clause 7, Article 45 of the Law amending and supplementing certain provisions of the Higher Education Law (Law No. 34/2018/QH14) mandates that higher education institutions must conduct accreditation of joint programs offered in Vietnam

as soon as the first cohort of students graduates and continue accreditation in accordance with the established cycle.

There are not yet accredited joint training programs reported officially by the Ministry of Education and Training. The key obstacles have been reported are lacking of standardized accreditation and oversight; recognition issues with foreign universities; legal and procedural hurdles, and issues with quality and academic integrity

2.4. Government policy toward transnational education

Vietnam's approach to transnational education (TNE) has evolved significantly, reflecting its commitment to international integration and educational reform. Those can be summarized as the followings (N. Nguyen & Lee, 2020):

- 1986 (Đổi Mới policy): Vietnam initiated economic and political reforms, embracing globalization and opening avenues for international collaborations in various sectors, including education.
- 2001 (Decree No. 18/2001/ND-CP): The government formalized regulations for foreign

significant revenues, particularly in well-established EdTech markets such as the US and Europe. In 2023, the integration of AI technology, particularly advanced language models like Chat GPT4, is expected to increasingly permeate EdTech products.

Vietnam possesses favorable conditions to emerge as one of the largest EdTech markets in Southeast Asia, supported by stable economic growth, a burgeoning digital economy, and significant investments in education and technology by both the government and society (Maheshwari & Kha, 2024; T. Q. Nguyen et al., 2024; Tran et al., 2017).

Over the past three years, Vietnam's EdTech market has experienced rapid growth, driven by the proliferation of learning platforms and English learning products. However, the quality of these products varies, with many new offerings utilizing basic technological elements such as websites, video lectures, or commonly available chat/video calling tools like Skype, Zoom, and Zalo.

By June 2023, Vietnamese EdTech startups have secured over 400 million USD from 70 domestic and international private investors, with prospects for ongoing investment and potential mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the near term. While K-12 remains the primary and most promising EdTech market segment in Vietnam, opportunities also exist in lesser-explored sectors such as Higher Education, Vocational Education, and Trainee Training. The emphasis on practical training and career development is not only a growing trend in Vietnam but also globally (EdTech Agency, 2023).

3. Investment in Vietnam higher education and international collaboration

Funding for education in Vietnam, overall, and specifically for educational technology in Vietnam, can be categorized into three primary sources: government funding, private investments, and financial assistance

from individuals, both domestic and international.

The government annually allocates funds for education, covering regular expenses and development investments, with a portion designated for educational technology. However, there is a lack of specific data on the expenditure category for educational technology. Eventhough, the average expenditure on equipment amounts to approximately 3-5 trillion VND per year, representing less than 2% of total regular education spending.

Private investment in education involves legal investments from organizations and individuals, including domestic and foreign investors. This can take various forms such as household expenditures, investments in company establishment, and contributions to capital through share purchases. Venture capital, typically sourced from significant domestic and international investment funds, is a common form of investment in EdTech. Publicly disclosed deals in this sector often involve substantial amounts, ranging from millions to tens of millions of USD.

Based on data from the Foreign Investment Agency under the Ministry of Planning & Investment, the total registered foreign direct investment (FDI) capital in the education and training sector had reached USD 4.59 billion by November 2022, primarily through capital contributions and share purchases. Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Training reported that between 2015 and 2020, they carried out 24 programs and projects funded by Official Development Assistance (ODA). Out of these, 13 projects were successfully completed, with an estimated total allocated capital exceeding 11,500 billion VND (equivalent to 490 million USD)

Statista projects that the online education market revenue in Vietnam will increase by 10.4% annually from 2023 to 2027, with an anticipated value of US\$487.60 million by 2027. The estimated average revenue per user is approximately US\$43.25 in 2023, according to Statista's data for that year.

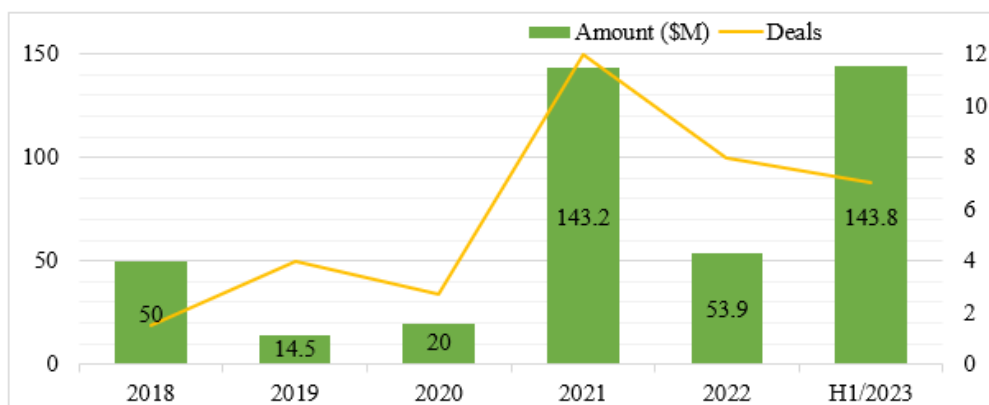


Figure 3. Venture capital investment in Vietnam EdTech sector (2018 to 2023)

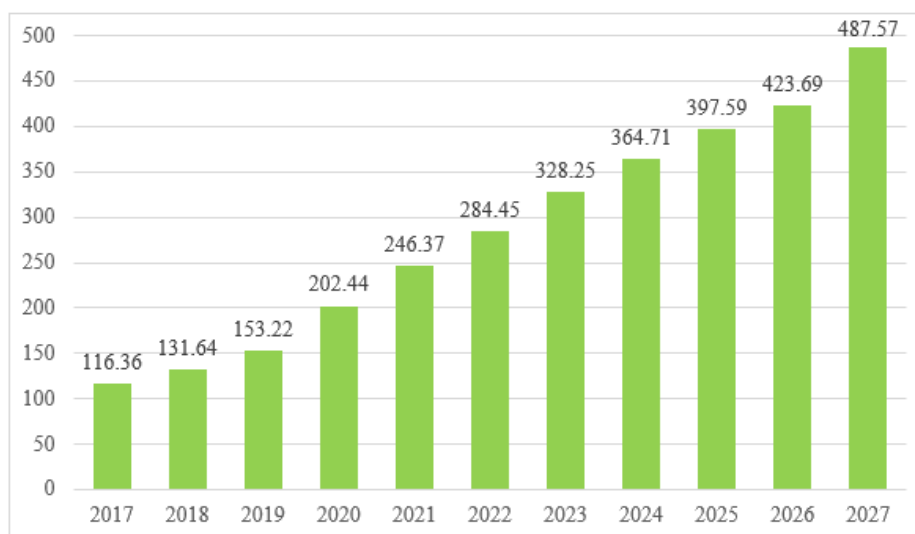


Figure 4. Forecast of the revenue of the online education market in USD millions (Statista, 2024)

In higher education, technology can enhance collaborative online or hybrid degree programs with international universities and provide career guidance and assistance to students in securing internships and employment opportunities beyond borders. Many universities have developed the Learning Management Systems (LMS) and provide full or partial (30% minimum) undergraduate/ postgraduate programs through online learning.

4. Conclusion

Vietnam is a potential market for transnational education with an open policy and encouragement of international investment and cooperation. While transnational education programs in Vietnam provide valuable global learning opportunities, they also face challenges related to affordability, quality control, and regulatory frameworks. Addressing these issues requires better policy support, improved oversight, and enhanced collaboration between local and foreign institutions to ensure that these programs meet both academic and industry standards.

Due to the limited availability of data, this research primarily relies on qualitative arguments rather than robust numerical evidence. However, this approach contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the market landscape, highlighting both its advantages and challenges. The findings offer valuable insights for scholars and policymakers, enabling more informed and thoughtful decision-making. Additionally, this study paves the way for future research opportunities in this field.

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