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Decentralization in Educational Management under Vietnam's Two-Tier Local Government System: Theoretical Foundations and a Competency Framework for Educational Administrators

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Abstract

The transition to a two-tier local government model in Vietnam since 2025 has significantly reshaped the governance structure of general education, particularly with the removal of the intermediary administrative level represented by district-level Departments of Education and Training. This transformation not only shortens chains of command but also increases demands for institutional autonomy, intersectoral coordination, and accountability among educational institutions and local authorities. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, drawing on policy and legal document analysis, as well as a systematic review of theoretical frameworks on educational decentralization and school leadership in decentralized contexts. Thereby, the paper elucidates the theoretical underpinnings of educational decentralization within the new institutional setting and proposes an adaptive competency framework for educational administrators, comprising five core pillars: (1) strategic leadership and system governance; (2) legal governance and decentralization management; (3) instructional leadership autonomy; (4) risk management and accountability; and (5) community engagement and intersectoral collaboration. This framework contributes to strengthening the theoretical and empirical basis for reforming the training, professional development, evaluation, and deployment of educational administrators during the transition to a two-tier local government model in Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education and training have long been regarded as a strategic priority in Vietnam's national development. Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (2013) emphasized the need for fundamental and comprehensive educational reform, shifting from knowledge transmission to the development of learners' qualities and competencies. This reform requires schools to become more autonomous, flexible, and accountable in organizing educational activities.

At the same time, the reform is closely connected with broader administrative reforms. Resolution No.18-NQ/TW of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (2017) called for streamlining the political and administrative system to improve its effectiveness and efficiency. In 2025, Vietnam's transition to a two-tier local government model marked a major institutional change. This reform was politically guided by Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW and Conclusion No. 130-KL/TW and 137-KL/TW, and was legally institutionalized through the Law on Organization of Local Government No. 72/2025/QH15 and related implementation documents.

In the education sector, this transition has significantly changed the governance structure. Under the previous three-tier model, district-level Divisions of Education and Training acted as intermediary units between provincial Departments of Education and Training and schools. They provided professional guidance, supervised school operations, supported curriculum implementation, and coordinated teacher management. With the removal of this intermediary level, educational governance has shifted from a "province-district-school" model to a new configuration involving provincial education authorities, commune-level administrative authorities, and schools.

This reform is not simply an administrative simplification. It redistributes authority, responsibility, and accountability across the education system. Provincial Departments of Education and Training must now provide more direct guidance to a larger number of institutions. Commune-level socio-cultural offices are expected to coordinate territorial matters such as school safety, infrastructure, educational environments, and community resources. Schools and principals must exercise greater operational discretion within legally defined boundaries while remaining accountable to provincial authorities, local communities, parents, and other stakeholders.

This new governance context creates both opportunities and challenges. The removal of an intermediary layer may reduce administrative delays and increase local responsiveness. However, it also places greater pressure on educational administrators. Principals are required to lead instructional development, manage personnel, ensure financial transparency, respond to risks, and coordinate with stakeholders with less direct support from district-level professional units. Provincial authorities must shift from micro-level control to system-level governance and risk-based support, while commune-level officials must coordinate educational matters without interfering in school professional autonomy.

These changes reveal a significant competency gap. Many current educational administrators were trained and socialized within the former three-tier governance structure, where hierarchical guidance and procedural compliance predominated. Under the two-tier model, effective educational management requires stronger competencies in strategic leadership, legal governance, instructional leadership, accountability, risk management, community engagement, and intersectoral coordination.

Previous studies on educational decentralization have emphasized the transfer of authority, responsibility, and resources to lower administrative levels or schools (Hanson, 1998). Research on school leadership has also highlighted the importance of transformational, instructional, distributed, and collaborative leadership in improving school performance (Bush & Glover, 2014; Hallinger &

Heck, 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003). Competency-based studies further identify vision building, human resource development, organizational management, instructional improvement, and community relations as important domains for school leaders (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019).

However, existing studies have not sufficiently examined the competency requirements of educational administrators in a context where the district-level educational management intermediary has been removed. In Vietnam, current standards for principals and educational administrators provide an important foundation, but they have not yet been systematically reinterpreted in relation to the new two-tier local government model. This creates a clear research gap.

Therefore, this study has two main objectives. *First*, it systematically reviews the theoretical foundations of educational management decentralization in relation to school autonomy, accountability, and leadership. *Second*, it proposes an adaptive competency framework for educational administrators under Vietnam's two-tier local government model. The framework is intended as a conceptual reference for training, professional development, performance evaluation, appointment, and policy design, rather than as a fully validated assessment instrument.

The study addresses two research questions:

RQ1. How does Vietnam's transition to a two-tier local government model reshape the governance structure of general education?

RQ2. What core competencies are required for educational administrators to operate effectively under the new decentralization framework?

The contribution of this study lies in integrating theories of educational decentralization, legal and policy analysis, and competency-based educational leadership. The proposed framework includes five core domains: strategic leadership and system governance; legal governance and decentralization management; instructional leadership autonomy; risk management and accountability; and community engagement and intersectoral collaboration. This framework provides a theoretical basis and a practical reference for educational governance reform in Vietnam during the transition to the two-tier local government model.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative document-based research design and is positioned as a conceptual and policy analysis study. It does not test hypotheses or examine causal relationships. Instead, it synthesizes theoretical foundations, analyzes relevant legal and policy documents, and develops an initial competency framework for educational administrators under Vietnam's two-tier local government model.

The study employs three main methods. *First*, policy and legal document analysis was conducted on Party resolutions, laws, decrees, Prime Ministerial decisions, and ministerial circulars related to local government restructuring, educational governance, teacher and administrator management, and authority delineation in the education sector. These documents were selected because they directly shape the redistribution of authority, responsibility, and accountability among provincial education authorities, commune-level administrations, and schools.

Second, an integrative literature review was used to synthesize studies on educational decentralization, school autonomy, accountability, school leadership, and competency frameworks. The review focused on identifying key concepts and leadership models relevant to decentralized educational governance, including transformational, instructional, distributed, and collaborative leadership.

Third, conceptual modeling was applied to develop the proposed framework. The analysis followed a logical sequence: identifying institutional changes under the two-tier model, examining their implications for educational governance, determining the new responsibilities of educational administrators, and synthesizing these requirements into core competency domains.

The analysis was organized around key themes, including decentralization, autonomy, accountability, legal authority, instructional leadership, risk management, system governance, territorial coordination, and community engagement. From these themes, the study identified five competency domains: strategic leadership and system governance; legal governance and decentralization management; instructional leadership autonomy; risk management and accountability; and community engagement and intersectoral collaboration.

Since this study does not use surveys, interviews, Delphi panels, or case studies, the proposed framework should be viewed as a conceptual reference rather than a validated assessment instrument. Future studies should validate the framework through expert consultation, Delphi techniques, the analytic hierarchy process (AHP), quantitative surveys, or comparative case studies in different local contexts.

3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. The Nature of Educational Management Decentralization

Educational decentralization refers to the redistribution of authority, responsibility, and resources from higher levels of administration to lower levels or directly to educational institutions. It is not simply the transfer of administrative workload, but a governance reform that changes how decisions are made, implemented, supervised, and evaluated. Hanson (1998) argues that decentralization may take different forms, including deconcentration, delegation, and devolution, depending on the degree of decision-making authority transferred to lower levels. From this perspective, decentralization in education should be understood as a multidimensional process involving authority allocation, resource mobilization, institutional autonomy, and accountability.

In educational governance, decentralization is often justified by the assumption that decisions are more effective when made closer to local contexts. Local actors are expected to understand learners' needs, community conditions, institutional constraints, and available resources better than distant administrative authorities. In the Vietnamese context, Edquist (2005) noted that decentralization may contribute to improving responsiveness and mobilizing local resources, although its effectiveness depends on institutional capacity and clarity in authority allocation. Therefore, decentralization does not automatically improve educational quality; it requires appropriate governance mechanisms and competent actors at each level of the system.

A central issue in educational decentralization is the relationship between autonomy and accountability. Autonomy without accountability may lead to fragmented governance, inconsistent implementation, and unclear responsibility. Conversely, accountability without sufficient decision-making authority may produce passive compliance and limit the ability of educational administrators to solve local problems. Truong and Tran (2025), in their analysis of university autonomy and sustainable development in Vietnam, emphasize that autonomy must be embedded in a clear legal framework and linked to public accountability. Although their study focuses on higher education, this principle is also relevant to general education, especially in the context of the two-tier local government model.

In Vietnam, the transition to a two-tier local government model gives educational decentralization a new meaning. The removal of the district-level educational management intermediary changes the

relationship among provincial education authorities, commune-level administrative authorities, and schools. As a result, educational administrators must operate in a more direct, flexible, and accountable governance environment. This transformation requires not only institutional restructuring but also the development of new competencies for those responsible for educational management.

3.2. School Leadership Models in Decentralized Contexts

Decentralized governance requires a significant shift in the role of school leaders. Principals are no longer merely administrative implementers of higher-level directives. Instead, they are expected to act as strategic, instructional, and collaborative leaders who can interpret policies, make context-sensitive decisions, mobilize resources, support teachers, and respond to local challenges. This shift reflects broader trends in educational leadership research, which has increasingly moved from hierarchical and bureaucratic models toward more distributed, transformational, and learning-centred approaches.

Several leadership models are relevant to decentralized educational governance. Transformational leadership emphasizes vision building, motivation, organizational change, and the development of shared commitment among teachers and staff. Instructional leadership focuses more directly on teaching quality, curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, and student learning outcomes. Distributed leadership highlights the sharing of leadership responsibilities among members of the school organization, while collaborative leadership emphasizes coordination among school leaders, teachers, families, communities, and external stakeholders. Bush and Glover (2014) argue that no single leadership model is universally applicable; rather, leadership effectiveness depends on the institutional context, governance structure, and organizational culture.

Empirical studies further show that school improvement is often associated with the integration of different leadership approaches. Marks and Printy (2003) found that student performance is strengthened when transformational leadership is combined with instructional leadership. Hallinger and Heck (2010) also demonstrated that collaborative leadership can contribute to school improvement by promoting collective responsibility and shared decision-making. These findings are particularly relevant to decentralized contexts, where school leaders must both lead internal professional development and coordinate with external actors.

A systematic review by Gumus et al. (2018) shows that educational leadership research has increasingly emphasized transformational, instructional, distributed, and teacher leadership models. This trend indicates that effective leadership in contemporary education systems requires more than administrative compliance. It requires adaptive capacity, shared responsibility, professional learning, and the ability to respond to changing governance environments. Under Vietnam's two-tier local government model, these leadership approaches need to be integrated, as school leaders must translate policy directions into school-level strategies, guide professional activities without relying heavily on district-level support, and coordinate with commune-level authorities and local communities.

3.3. Competency Frameworks for Educational Administrators

A competency framework identifies the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors required for effective professional performance. For educational administrators, competencies include not only knowledge of regulations and administrative procedures but also strategic thinking, instructional leadership, organizational management, communication, problem-solving, adaptability, and accountability. Competency frameworks are useful because they provide a basis for recruitment, appointment, training, professional development, performance evaluation, and career progression.

Previous studies have emphasized several important leadership competencies. Hitt and Tucker (2016), through a systematic review of leadership practices influencing student achievement, identified key domains such as establishing vision, building professional capacity, creating a supportive organization, facilitating high-quality instruction, and connecting with external communities. These domains show that school leadership is closely linked to both internal organizational development and external stakeholder engagement.

Lambert and Bouchamma (2019) argue that competency frameworks for school principals must reflect the real work pressures and daily responsibilities of educational leaders. A framework that is too abstract or disconnected from practice may have limited value for professional development and evaluation. Similarly, Janse van Vuuren and Van der Bank (2023) emphasize behavioral competencies, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and decision-making capacity as important elements of effective school leadership in complex environments. These studies suggest that competency frameworks should not only describe formal responsibilities but also identify observable behaviors and adaptive capacities.

In Vietnam, Ngo (2017) proposed an initial competency framework for lower secondary school principals, contributing to the discussion on leadership standards and professional development. More recently, Nguyen and Kim (2024) examined school leadership in relation to autonomy and accountability, emphasizing that principals must balance independent decision-making with transparency and responsibility. Existing standards for principals and educational administrators in Vietnam, such as those issued by the Ministry of Education and Training, provide an important foundation for evaluating professional performance. However, these standards were mainly developed in the context of the former three-tier administrative structure. Therefore, they need to be reinterpreted and further developed to reflect the new governance requirements created by the two-tier local government model.

3.4. Research Gap and Analytical Framework

The reviewed literature shows that educational decentralization, school autonomy, accountability, school leadership, and competency frameworks have been widely discussed. Hanson (1998) provides a foundational understanding of decentralization forms; Edquist (2005) highlights the Vietnamese experience of decentralizing educational management; Truong and Tran (2025) emphasize the link between autonomy, legal frameworks, and accountability; Bush and Glover (2014), Marks and Printy (2003), Hallinger and Heck (2010), and Gumus et al. (2018) clarify different models of school leadership; while Hitt and Tucker (2016), Lambert and Bouchamma (2019), Janse van Vuuren and Van der Bank (2023), Ngo (2017), and Nguyen and Kim (2024) provide important foundations for understanding leadership competencies.

However, there remains a clear research gap. Existing studies have not sufficiently examined the competency requirements of educational administrators in a context, wherein the district-level educational management intermediary has been removed. International studies provide useful theoretical foundations but do not fully capture the specific institutional conditions of Vietnam's current reform. Meanwhile, Vietnamese studies and standards on educational leadership provide important references but have not yet been systematically reinterpreted in relation to the two-tier local government model.

This study addresses that gap by developing a competency framework based on the relationship between institutional restructuring and competency transformation. The analytical logic is as follows: the two-tier local government model changes the structure of educational governance; this change redistributes authority and accountability among provincial education authorities, commune-level administrative authorities, and schools; these new responsibilities require educational administrators to develop new competencies.

Based on this logic, the study proposes five core competency domains: strategic leadership and system governance; legal governance and decentralization management; instructional leadership autonomy; risk management and accountability; and community engagement and intersectoral collaboration. These domains provide the theoretical basis for the competency framework presented in the following section.

4. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE UNDER THE TWO-TIER MODEL

The transition to a two-tier local government model in Vietnam has created a new institutional context for educational governance. Politically, this reform is associated with the broader orientation of streamlining the administrative apparatus and improving governance effectiveness. Legally, it has been institutionalized through the Law on Organization of Local Government No. 72/2025/QH15 and related implementation documents. In the education sector, this transition has required a redistribution of functions among provincial education authorities, commune-level administrative authorities, and schools.

Under the previous three-tier structure, educational governance followed a “province-district-school” model. District-level Divisions of Education and Training served as intermediary professional management units. They played an important role in transmitting policy directives, guiding curriculum implementation, monitoring school activities, coordinating teacher management, and supporting preschool, primary, and lower secondary education institutions.

Given the two-tier model, this intermediary level has been removed. Educational governance is now reorganized around a more direct relationship among provincial Departments of Education and Training, commune-level socio-cultural offices, and schools. Provincial Departments of Education and Training are responsible for sectoral management, professional guidance, and system-level supervision. Commune-level authorities perform territorial coordination functions related to school safety, infrastructure, local educational environments, and community resources. Schools are required to take greater initiative in managing internal operations, instructional activities, personnel coordination, and accountability obligations.

This restructuring has three major implications for educational management. First, schools are expected to exercise greater operational discretion within the boundaries of the law. Principals and leadership teams must make more independent decisions in areas such as teaching organization, professional development, internal quality assurance, and stakeholder coordination. Second, accountability requirements become more direct and multidimensional. Schools must report not only to provincial education authorities but also respond to expectations from commune-level authorities, parents, communities, and learners. Third, provincial education authorities face increasing pressure to shift from detailed administrative control to system governance, data-informed supervision, and risk-based support.

At the commune level, the new model creates a coordinating role rather than a replacement for the former district-level professional education authority. Commune-level socio-cultural offices are expected to support educational development through territorial management, intersectoral coordination, and community mobilization. However, they should not interfere unduly in the professional autonomy of schools. This distinction is important for maintaining a balance between territorial governance and school-level professional decision-making.

Therefore, the two-tier model should not be understood simply as a reduction in administrative layers. It represents a transformation in the logic of educational governance. Authority, responsibility, and accountability are redistributed among different actors, requiring each group of educational administrators to develop new competencies. Provincial officials need stronger system governance and data-use capacity. School leaders need legal literacy, instructional leadership, accountability management, and risk response capacity. Commune-level officials need coordination, communication, and community engagement competencies.

In this context, developing a competency framework for educational administrators is necessary. Such a framework can help clarify the professional requirements of different administrative actors and provide a basis for training, evaluation, appointment, and professional development during the transition to the two-tier local government model.

5. PROPOSED COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS UNDER THE TWO-TIER MODEL

5.1. Target Groups and Scope of Application

The proposed competency framework is designed for three groups of educational administrators under Vietnam's two-tier local government model: provincial-level education administrators, school-level administrators, and commune-level administrative officials responsible for education-related matters.

The framework may be used as a conceptual reference for training, professional development, appointment, performance evaluation, and the identification of competency gaps. However, it should not be understood as a fully validated assessment instrument. Further empirical validation is required before it can be used as an official evaluation tool.

Table 1. Target Groups and Scope of Application

Target group	Main actors	Main application
Provincial-level education administrators	Directors, deputy directors, and officials of Departments of Education and Training	System governance, professional guidance, supervision, policy implementation, and support for schools
School-level administrators	Principals and vice principals of preschool and general education institutions	School governance, instructional leadership, personnel coordination, accountability, and stakeholder engagement
Commune-level education-related officials	Officials of commune-level Culture and Social Affairs Offices	Territorial coordination, school safety, infrastructure support, community mobilization, and intersectoral collaboration

5.2. Principles for Developing the Framework

The framework was developed based on four principles. *First*, it reflects the new governance relationship among provincial sectoral authorities, commune-level territorial coordination, and school autonomy. *Second*, it emphasizes observable competencies rather than only formal administrative duties. *Third*, each competency domain is linked to the practical requirements created by the two-tier local government model. *Fourth*, the framework remains open to future adjustment through expert consultation and empirical validation.

Table 2. Principles for Developing the Competency Framework

Principle	Explanation
Systemic alignment	The framework reflects the relationship among provincial governance, commune-level coordination, and school autonomy.
Practical relevance	Competencies are linked to real management responsibilities under the two-tier model.
Behavioral orientation	Competencies are described through observable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and actions.
Developmental flexibility	The framework can be refined through Delphi studies, AHP methods, surveys, or case studies.

5.3. Structure of the Competency Framework

The proposed framework consists of five core competency domains. These domains were developed based on the relationship between institutional restructuring and new governance and managerial requirements. The removal of the district-level educational management intermediary has increased the need for strategic leadership, legal literacy, instructional leadership autonomy, accountability, risk management, and community coordination.

Table 3. Overview of the Proposed Competency Framework

No.	Competency domain	Core meaning	Main governance requirement
1	Strategic leadership and system governance	Ability to set direction, use data, and guide institutional development	Managing education in a more direct and system-oriented governance structure
2	Legal governance and decentralization management	Ability to understand and apply legal authority correctly	Exercising autonomy within legally defined boundaries
3	Independent instructional leadership	Ability to lead teaching, curriculum, and teacher development	Maintaining instructional quality without district-level professional support
4	Risk management and accountability	Ability to manage risks and ensure transparency	Strengthening direct accountability to authorities and communities
5	Community engagement and intersectoral collaboration	Ability to coordinate with families, local authorities, and social partners	Mobilizing local resources and solving educational issues through collaboration

5.3.1. Strategic Leadership and System Governance

Strategic leadership and system governance refer to the ability to understand educational development at both system and institutional levels. Under the two-tier model, administrators must be able to interpret policy directions, use data for planning, and translate macro-level reforms into practical strategies for schools and localities.

Table 4. Strategic Leadership and System Governance

Target group	Key competency requirements
Provincial-level administrators	Use educational data for system planning; guide schools directly; shift from micro-level control to system-level governance; design risk-based support mechanisms.

Target group	Key competency requirements
School-level administrators	Develop school vision and strategic plans; align school goals with provincial orientations and local needs; promote innovation and organizational learning.
Commune-level officials	Understand local educational demand; support school network planning; integrate educational development into local socio-economic plans.
Developmental flexibility	The framework can be refined through Delphi studies, AHP methods, surveys, or case studies.

This competency is essential because the two-tier model requires educational administrators to move beyond routine compliance and adopt a more strategic, evidence-informed, and adaptive approach to governance.

5.3.2. Legal Governance and Decentralization Management

Legal governance and decentralization management refer to the ability to understand, interpret, and apply regulations accurately. In the new governance structure, administrators must clearly recognize the boundaries of authority among provincial education authorities, commune-level administrations, and schools.

Table 5. Legal Governance and Decentralization Management

Target group	Key competency requirements
Provincial-level administrators	Provide legal and professional guidance; supervise compliance; ensure consistency in policy implementation across schools and localities.
School-level administrators	Make decisions on personnel, teaching organization, finance, internal regulations, and accountability within legally defined authority.
Commune-level officials	Perform territorial management functions; support schools in local matters; avoid inappropriate interference in professional autonomy.

This competency is important because increased autonomy also increases legal responsibility. Educational administrators must exercise authority confidently while minimizing legal risks, administrative overlap, and accountability gaps.

5.3.3. Independent Instructional Leadership

Independent instructional leadership refers to the ability to lead teaching, curriculum implementation, teacher professional development, and learning improvement without depending heavily on district-level professional support.

Table 6. Independent Instructional Leadership

Target group	Key competency requirements
Provincial-level administrators	Develop professional support systems; monitor instructional quality; provide guidance on curriculum implementation and teacher development.
School-level administrators	Organize professional learning communities; support teachers; develop school-based educational plans; monitor teaching quality; promote pedagogical innovation.
Commune-level officials	Support learning environments, extracurricular spaces, community learning activities, and local educational resources.

This competency ensures that decentralization does not weaken instructional quality. Instead, it strengthens school-level professional responsibility and encourages principals to become more active instructional leaders.

5.3.4. Risk Management and Accountability

Risk management and accountability refer to the ability to identify, prevent, respond to, and learn from risks while ensuring transparency in educational governance. Under the two-tier model, accountability becomes more direct and multidimensional.

Table 7. Risk Management and Accountability

Target group	Key competency requirements
Provincial-level administrators	Develop risk-based supervision systems; use educational data for monitoring; provide timely support to schools facing difficulties.
School-level administrators	Ensure transparency in finance, educational quality, student safety, crisis communication, and public reporting.
Commune-level officials	Coordinate intersectoral responses involving health, security, public order, infrastructure, and community actors when educational risks occur.

This competency is necessary because autonomy without accountability may lead to inconsistency, while accountability without risk management may result in passive compliance rather than proactive governance.

5.3.5. Community Engagement and Intersectoral Collaboration

Community engagement and intersectoral collaboration refer to the ability to build partnerships among schools, families, local authorities, social organizations, businesses, and other community stakeholders.

Table 8. Community Engagement and Intersectoral Collaboration

Target group	Key competency requirements
Provincial-level administrators	Develop mechanisms for transparent and equitable resource mobilization; promote cooperation among schools and local stakeholders.
School-level administrators	Coordinate with parents, commune-level authorities, local organizations, and businesses to improve educational conditions and support students.
Commune-level officials	Serve as connectors between schools and local resources; support intersectoral coordination for school safety, infrastructure, and community learning.

This competency is especially important because many educational issues cannot be solved by schools alone. School safety, infrastructure, student support, traffic around school areas, local cultural education, and community learning all require coordination among multiple actors.

5.4. Developmental Levels of Competency

To support future application, each competency may be assessed according to four developmental levels. These levels describe the progression from basic compliance to leadership and innovation.

Table 9. Developmental Levels of Competency

Level	Description
Level 1: Awareness and compliance	Administrators understand current regulations and perform assigned tasks according to established procedures.
Level 2: Application and implementation	Administrators apply regulations and professional knowledge to address common management tasks and recurring problems.
Level 3: Proficiency and adaptation	Administrators handle complex situations, adapt to changing conditions, and optimize available resources.
Level 4: Leadership and innovation	Administrators create new solutions, inspire others, and contribute to improving governance practices beyond their own institution.

The five competency domains are closely connected. Strategic leadership provides direction; legal governance defines the boundaries of action; instructional leadership ensures the quality of teaching and learning; risk management and accountability protect transparency and system stability; and community engagement strengthens local support for education.

Together, these domains form an adaptive competency framework for educational administrators under Vietnam's two-tier local government model. The framework responds to the new governance context in which authority is more directly distributed, schools have greater operational responsibility, and accountability becomes more visible to both state authorities and local communities.

6. CONCLUSION

The transition to a two-tier local government model has significantly reshaped Vietnam's educational governance structure by redistributing authority, responsibility, and accountability among provincial education authorities, commune-level administrative authorities, and schools. Based on theoretical synthesis and policy analysis, this study proposes an adaptive competency framework for educational administrators consisting of five core domains: strategic leadership and system governance; legal governance and decentralization management; instructional leadership autonomy; risk management and accountability; and community engagement and intersectoral collaboration. The framework provides a conceptual reference for training, professional development, appointment, performance evaluation, and policy design in the context of educational decentralization. However, as this study is conceptual and document-based, the proposed framework has not yet been empirically validated. Future studies should test and refine the framework through expert consultation, Delphi techniques, the analytic hierarchy process (AHP), quantitative surveys, or comparative case studies across different local contexts in Vietnam.

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