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Beyond Design: Institutionalizing the Creative Turn in Vietnamese Universities

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam's cultural and creative industries (CCIs) policy is among the most explicitly articulated in Southeast Asia, particularly in its delineation of subsectors, GDP-oriented targets, and the strategic role assigned to universities. However, after more than a decade, the formal adoption of CCIs frameworks often appears to outpace substantive operational change. Drawing on neo-institutional theory, especially institutional isomorphism and organizational decoupling, this study analyzes eleven interviews across Hanoi-based higher education institutions alongside national policy documents (2013–2025). The findings indicate that universities respond to reform pressures by adopting formal markers of alignment, while core pedagogical practices remain relatively unchanged, positioning Vietnam as a critical case of policy-driven convergence without equivalent transformation.

Keywords: Cultural and Creative Industries; Creative Economy; Governance; Higher Education; Institutional Isomorphism; Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) refer to knowledge-based businesses that specialize in the production, distribution, and consumption of cultural and creative products and services. CCIs have become thriving industries with job creation, exports, and innovation, contributing to the enhancement of cultural diversity as economies shift toward ideas and creativity (UNCTAD, 2018, 2024). These industries, according to Florida (2002), are characteristic of the so-called creative economy, whereby innovation is a major asset of growth. In this way, CCIs impact international sociocultural development, identity and economic growth. Education undoubtedly played an undetachable role in the emergence of CCIs. Since the 1960s, universities have been collaborating with CCIs, and related programs have become full courses of study by the early 2000s (Comunian *et al.*, 2020; Hua, 2019). The Fourth Industrial Revolution was associated with a rise in demand for courses that react to automation and technological change as more routine jobs are lost and hybrid, creative-technical skills gain more significance (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2020). Porter (1990) observes that nations continue to be competitive through advancing to an innovation-based level that emphasizes ideas, talent, and creativity. Considering this change, institutions need to promote entrepreneurship, digital fluency, and critical and creative thinking (de Gastyne, 2020).

Vietnam has gradually moved away from a culture of welfare to one that prioritizes development in a creative economy (Nguyen, 2022). Since the beginning of the 21st century, policymakers have established CCIs as bastions of soft power and sustainable development. Cultural industries were first applied to policy making in 2014, when Resolution 33-NQ/TW explicitly requested the creation of cultural industries in a socialist-oriented market economy. The 2016 National Strategy on Cultural Industries (Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg) was the first framework to cover 12 subsectors, such as advertising, architecture, video games, crafts, film, fashion, performing arts and cultural tourism. It focused on human capital by creating links between training and education and education and industry targets to ensure that by 2020 and 2030, CCIs will be at 3% and 7% of GDP, respectively. This idea is later confirmed by the most recently revised national strategy released in 2025 that extends the vision to 2045 (Decision 2486/QĐ-TTg). This resulted in an actual relationship between university reform and the development of the cultural industry, providing new opportunities, research and international cooperation.

Later, instruments were able to implement it better. It was the task of provinces and ministries to pilot creative-skills programs, promote investment, and map data, which is the duty of the Action Plan (Decision 4189/QĐ-BVHTTDL, 2016). Resolution 102/NQ-CP (2021) focuses heavily on the development of ecosystems and legal frameworks. Directive 30/CT-TTg (2024) announced a new

period to stimulate state-enterprise-international collaboration in the training of CCIs, while noting the significance of digital transformation, workforce development, and internationalization. Moreover, while Decision 131/QĐ-TTg mentioned the importance of CCIs-related skills and the role of related training, Science, Technology, and Innovation Strategy 2021-2030 (Decision 569/QĐ-TTg) continued expanding the role of higher education institutions in the national creative ecosystem, encouraging stronger linkages between scientific research, product commercialization, and the development of creative industries. Vietnam has also become a part of regional cooperation with South Korea, the UK and ASEAN and the Creative Cities program of UNESCO (for example, Hanoi as a Creative City of Design). These policies ensure that CCIs are at the intersection of urban development, technology and education, which is an intersectoral vision.

Ambition, however, overtakes performance. Poor intersectoral coordination, undeveloped networks, underperforming state management and, most importantly, the absence of qualified human resources have been recorded. VICAS *et al.*'s report (2014) revealed that enterprise incentives were lacking, that creative education was inadequate and that management skills were deficient. Diffusion of funds, varying public–private partnerships and slowness in adapting to the curriculum were also cited. Most universities still operate according to traditional patterns; they offer few advanced courses in modern areas, such as game design, digital advertising, or fashion management, even though these fields are in high demand. The mismatch of skills can be attributed to the focus of arts and culture programs on traditional content and the lack of digital media, entrepreneurship, and the management of creative projects. Employers struggle to obtain graduates who can synthesize technical, business and creative expertise, and talent building remains largely a state-aided institution with minimal involvement of private and independent individuals.

According to experience abroad, universities need to be training grounds and incubators. Comunian and Gilmore (2015) remark that the two pillars of the creative economy are R&D in terms of creative knowledge and creative human capital, which are concentrated on universities. Universities are the source of the workforce and innovation pipeline to help CCIs through specialized education and creative experimentation. This is translated to mean redesigned courses, industry-based practice partnerships and multidisciplinary initiatives between business, technology and the arts in Vietnam. Even though they are small scale, pilot schemes such as entrepreneurship training and creative hubs with UNESCO and the British Council are promising. A graded, structured reaction is needed to produce professionals, managers, and innovators capable of sustaining a competitive CCIs ecosystem.

The growing prominence of cultural and creative industries in Vietnamese development strategy represents what this paper calls a *creative turn* in higher education, not simply the addition of new program titles or policy language but a

demand that universities fundamentally reorganize their internal logics: their curricula, faculty reward systems, research definitions, and conceptions of what counts as legitimate knowledge production (O'Connor, 2010; Flew, 2012). This is an ambitious demand. It is also, as comparative evidence increasingly suggests, that universities tend to meet only partially, that is, adopting outward forms of transformation while preserving inherited operational arrangements largely intact. Understanding why this gap between policy ambition and institutional practice persists and what sustains it is the analytical problem this paper addresses.

To explain this gap, this paper draws on neo-institutional theory, specifically the concepts of institutional isomorphism and organizational decoupling. The argument is not that Vietnamese universities are failing, in any simple sense, to implement CCIs education. It is that they are responding to external reform pressures in ways that are theoretically predictable and structurally produced: adopting the formal vocabulary, structures, and symbolic markers of CCIs alignment while the technical core of their operations (faculty incentive systems, assessment criteria, disciplinary boundaries, infrastructure allocation) changes more slowly, if at all. This pattern, which Meyer and Rowan (1977) termed *decoupling* and whose recent scholarship has identified as a pervasive feature of quality reform in higher education globally (Gorostidi & Rubio-Arostegui, 2026), is not unique to Vietnam. What is distinctive about the Vietnamese case is the particular configuration of pressures producing it and the specific institutional conditions that sustain the gap between rhetorical alignment and operational transformation.

This paper applies that framework to the Vietnamese case, thus, not to measure Vietnamese universities against standards developed elsewhere, but to understand, from within the specific conditions of a rapidly developing Southeast Asian system, why the creative turn in higher education has thus far been more visible in policy than in practice. Empirically, it draws on a systematic analysis of national CCIs' policy documents from 2013 to 2025, together with eleven in-depth interviews conducted across a purposive sample of institutions in Vietnam. Theoretically, it argues that what looks from outside, such as implementation lag, is better understood as a structurally produced outcome, one generated partly by the mechanisms through which CCIs reform is being pursued and partly, as this paper documents, by contradictions within the policy framework itself. Identifying those conditions and what addressing them would require is what the analysis that follows attempts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Porter (1990) argued that advanced economies need to transition into innovation-driven stages where talent and its development through specialized education are just as important as land or capital. This is where traditional arguments about competitiveness converge. As a result, universities everywhere are under pressure to dismantle the boundaries between the arts, sciences, and technology and implement teaching strategies that encourage experimentation and teamwork. According to UNESCO-affiliated research, many nations are incorporating creativity into their curricula (Shaheen, 2010). However, realizing this potential is challenging because institutional innovation frequently lags behind policy ambitions and rigid systems adapt slowly. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that higher education needs to serve as a stimulant for the talent pipelines needed by the creative economy.

Notably, regional differences exist in institutional responses. The modern CCIs discourse originated in the United Kingdom, where there was a concerted effort in the early 2000s to define and enhance the role of universities. While the Arts and Humanities Research Council established knowledge-exchange programs connecting academia and industry and funded studies demonstrating sectoral impacts, Universities UK (2010) called for greater acknowledgment of the contributions of higher education (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010). Research was used more by arts policy organizations to estimate the return on investment in the arts (Fisher, 2012). Most universities welcomed the change, despite some academics opposing what they perceived as a techno-economic logic forced on the humanities (Bullen *et al.*, 2004). University–industry connections in cultural fields were incorporated into assessment frameworks, collaborative projects, creative hubs, and internship pipelines, and "knowledge transfer" became a catchphrase for policy (Comunian *et al.*, 2014). Western policy essentially reframed universities as collaborators in ecosystems of creative innovation rather than as intellectual sanctuaries.

In regard to conceptual frames, different perspectives have been recorded. Florida's concept of a "creative class" in the U.S. emphasizes how knowledge workers, artists, designers, and scientists can form clusters to support urban growth (Florida, 2002). Instead, European policy organizes culture across the public, non-profit, and private sectors and places a strong emphasis on market domain advertising, architecture, design, film, music, and media (Weckerle *et al.*, 2008). The two perspectives highlight important realities of creative work: jobs are project-based, insecure and often freelance (Banks & Hesmondhalgh, 2009), and outputs are distinct and unpredictable (Fesel & Sondermann, 2007). With post-industrial economies shifting to knowledge and services, creative centers are drawn into urban centers, occasionally at the expense of manufacturing, and creative industry project ecologies start to look more like the future of the work

more generally (Kleine, 2009). Owing to this volatility, colleges feel pressure to equip their graduates with careers on the basis of uncertainty, entrepreneurship and managing portfolios rather than in linear employment.

Despite the ongoing controversy, European higher education responded by placing a strong emphasis on "employability". Some students in the arts and design fields oppose commercial framing, which appears to jeopardize artistic integrity, and many still graduate without entrepreneurial skills or career planning (Clark, 2012). Most communications-design graduates felt unprepared for business practice, according to studies conducted in Germany (Maser *et al.*, 2012). Self-employment rates are several times higher than they are in traditional fields (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010), and approximately one-third of creative graduates in the UK work as freelancers or entrepreneurs (Ball *et al.*, 2010). As a result, the curriculum now incorporates enterprise education. The "T-shaped" graduate, who combines extensive transferable skills with profound creative expertise, is the new paradigm (Bridgstock, 2013, 2019). However, there is ongoing discussion about the appropriate level of professional orientation, with some expressing concern that excessive commercialization may undermine artistic and intellectual values (Dreesmann *et al.*, 2014).

The Bologna process, which standardized degree structures and prioritized employability, exacerbated these tensions. Although it was mentioned only in passing in the original Bologna Declaration, "employability" became a key policy goal in Germany. From "labor-market-relevant qualifications" (Bologna Declaration, 1999) to "competencies for lifelong learning" (Salamanca Communiqué, 2001), the idea eventually evolved into a vague, general goal (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012). By suggesting that transferable skills are sufficient for job readiness and ignoring domain-specific expertise, scholars warn that this trend runs the risk of oversimplifying higher education (Wolter & Schaeper, 2008; Teichler, 2009). Teachers emphasize that creativity in the arts is difficult to measure because while technical skill can be evaluated, an autonomous artistic voice emerges (Jacobs, 2009). Rogoff (2006) cautioned against creating "streamlined" artists who are suited to predetermined results. In the past, long-standing German customs allowed students more time to experiment, but efficiency-driven reforms pushed for quicker completion, making the problems of striking a balance between freedom and accountability more acute. Additionally, policymakers demanded graduate tracking and more transparent results (e.g., Lisbon Declaration 2007). Teichler (2009) noted that although such data are helpful, designing curricula around them runs the risk of shifting fine-art programs toward applied fields just because alumni work in those fields at the expense of experimentation. General takeaway is obvious: higher education must strike a balance between employability and creativity without letting the latter take precedence.

Asian systems, which are characterized by their unique philosophies and quick expansion, add even more variation. With exports reaching $228 billion, Asia's CCI revenues nearly doubled those of Europe between 2002 and 2015; China and Southeast Asia emerged as manufacturing and content powerhouses (UNCTAD, 2018). To promote innovative thinking, many nations implemented cross-sectoral approaches that brought together the public and private sectors. Aspects of this are referred to by scholars as "knowledge socialism," a networked, collective orientation that makes use of peer production, digital culture, and collective intelligence (Zhang *et al.*, 2023; Peters, 2021).

In Japan, the educational philosophy is human oriented, which favors teamwork in innovation. Sato Manabu (Zhang & Fang, 2024) suggested that democratic, collective learning that incorporates communities, teachers, and students should be the core, as the creative economy demands that employers seek global human resources with resilience, communication skills, and a balanced identity (Japanese Cabinet Office, 2012). Universities, particularly graduate programs, are under pressure from industry associations to produce professionals with multidisciplinary expertise, real-world experience, and managerial skills. Additionally, Japan has experimented with deliberative forums that involve thousands of students in the process of forming reforms (Nomiya, 2015). However, selective entrance exams are still in place, which reflect long-standing limitations on the implementation of creative education reforms.

China's strategy, which connects CCIs to national soft power, is more overtly state driven. To support creative industries, interministerial policies coordinate science and technology, education, culture, and commerce (UNCTAD, 2008). In 2020, national guidelines focused on fostering digital creativity and integrating it with manufacturing, education, tourism, and sports while R&D platforms and clusters were established. China promotes interdisciplinarity, entrepreneurship, and openness in higher education by advancing the "creative university" ideal (Zhang *et al.*, 2023; Peters, 2014). Universities have started interdisciplinary colleges, incubators, and entrepreneurship programs; Tsinghua's i-Center offers mentorship and advanced fabrication, and new schools such as Westlake and Southern University of Science and Technology serve as experimental models for developing top talent. These initiatives are furthered by open science and education, with national platforms such as the China Science and Technology Cloud and the Open University of China expanding access and promoting knowledge exchange (CNIC-CODATA, 2022).

Taken together, all these directions go toward the same point: the European discourse of the implications of Bologna outcomes, the hybridized approach of state-led and cooperative innovation of Asia, and the transatlantic emphasis on employability and knowledge transfer. It is more challenging than just creating work-ready graduates or sheltering artistic autonomy in the sanctum to design programs that are based on intensive, creative expertise as well as the

collaborative, entrepreneurial, and adaptive abilities that creative, technologically advanced economies need and demand when developing a creative workforce. To ensure that creativity is not reduced to mere compliance and does not become alienated from the contemporary workplace, universities need to maintain spaces where originality can thrive as they develop linkages with industry and society.

What the comparative literature ultimately demonstrates is not a single model of CCI higher education transformation but a field-wide isomorphic convergence on a recognizable set of institutional forms (interdisciplinary curricula, industry partnership structures, entrepreneurial incubators, practice-based research frameworks) driven partly by a genuine pedagogical rationale and partly by the legitimating power of international policy discourse (Flew, 2012; Comunian & Gilmore, 2015). The critical question for any national context and for Vietnam in particular is not whether these forms are adopted but how deeply they penetrate institutional practice. Clark's (1998) comparative analysis of entrepreneurial university transformation revealed that sustained institutional change required not only the adoption of new structural features but also the transformation of the internal steering core—the values, priorities, and decision-making logics of senior academic and administrative leadership. As deeper reorientation is absent, reform tends to remain at the periphery: new programs are launched but not resourced, interdisciplinarity is declared but not incentivized, and industry partnerships are formalized but not operationalized. This observation is particularly relevant in the Vietnamese context, where CCIs' policy reform has been externally energetic but institutionally shallow, a disparity that the institutional lens developed above renders theoretically intelligible rather than merely disappointing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The comparative literature reviewed above documents a pattern sufficiently consistent across national contexts to demand explanation rather than description. DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) foundational analysis of institutional isomorphism argues that organizations within the same institutional field tend to converge in structure over time, not because convergent forms are more effective but because they are more legitimate in the eyes of the actors whose approval organizations depend upon states, accreditation bodies, funding agencies, and peer institutions. This convergence operates through three mechanisms. Coercive isomorphism refers to pressures from formal mandates (legislation, regulatory requirements, and policy directives) that compel the adoption of particular structures. Mimetic isomorphism describes imitative responses to uncertainty: When organizations lack confidence in existing models or face unclear goals, they replicate peers perceived as successful. Normative isomorphism captures the homogenizing influence of professionalization (shared standards, credentialing

norms, and disciplinary expectations diffused through academic networks and training pipelines).

A recent synthesis of 113 studies on quality management and institutional change in higher education confirms that all three mechanisms remain analytically active in contemporary reform contexts and that their simultaneous activation tends to produce convergence in formal structure without corresponding transformation in practice (Gorostidi & Rubio-Arostegui, 2026). Central to this analysis is the concept of decoupling, introduced by Meyer and Rowan (1977) to describe what happens when external institutional pressures demand new formal structures that are incompatible with established operational routines. Rather than genuinely reorganizing, organizations maintain a ceremonial alignment with external demands, while day-to-day practice remains largely unchanged. It is, in fact, a structurally rational response to an environment in which rewards (legitimacy, funding access, positive policy evaluation, etc.) accrue from formal adoption regardless of whether operational transformation has occurred. Gorostidi and Rubio-Arostegui (2026) observe that in higher education specifically, institutions can incorporate internationally recognized standards and frameworks "without these necessarily transforming internal processes, academic culture, or management decisions", a dynamic they identify as particularly pronounced in systems with weak institutional autonomy or rapidly shifting policy demands.

Applied to CCIs' higher education, this framework has begun to receive direct scholarly attention. Salvador and Comunian (2024), who examine the relationship between higher education institutions and CCIs development, argue that mimetic isomorphism is likely to intensify as universities face mounting pressure to demonstrate the relevance of CCIs without established domestic models to draw upon. In conditions of genuine uncertainty, they note that imitation is less risky than differentiation, a dynamic that helps explain why Vietnamese universities tend to replicate international program structures without necessarily developing the internal conditions that those structures presuppose. Roberts, Lowe and Moreton (2025), analyzing university-creative economy programs in the United Kingdom, identify a related pattern they describe as the overcoding of reform: new policy language is overlaid on existing institutional arrangements without restructuring the arrangements themselves, producing programs that perform CCIs alignment without enacting it. Taken together, these contributions suggest that the gap between CCIs' policy ambition and institutional practice is not a transitional problem that more time or funding will resolve. It is a structural feature of how organizations respond to externally driven transformation, and understanding it requires attending to the specific configuration of pressures producing it in any given context.

The Vietnamese case presents a particular configuration worth examining in its own right. It is not a Global North case to which existing theory applies straightforwardly. Vietnam's higher education system is weighted by a specific

formation, shaped by decades of centralized planning, discipline-based faculty structures, and a conception of the university's social function that does not map neatly onto the entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented models that CCIs policy implicitly demands. Moreover, it is a system under genuine and accelerating reform pressure, navigating an ambitious policy agenda without the institutional precedents or interministerial coordination mechanisms that more established creative economy systems have developed over time. What makes Vietnam analytically interesting and potentially instructive for comparable contexts across Southeast Asia is precisely this combination: high policy ambition; rapid formal adoption; and the particular institutional conditions—normative, administrative, and material—that shape how adoption unfolds.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative design that combines document analysis and expert interviews to examine educational policies and practices related to CCIs in Vietnam's higher education system. The methodological approach is grounded in policy review frameworks and interpretivist traditions, which are appropriate for analyzing complex socio-educational phenomena shaped by context and meaning (Bowen, 2009; Patton, 2015).

The first component is document analysis. Data were drawn from official policy texts, institutional reports, curriculum frameworks, and strategic planning documents obtained from four internally provided sources. These documents cover national-level strategies and institutional-level implementations of CCIs-related education. The selection criterion focused on relevance to CCIs' curriculum development, institutional evaluation, and policy direction. The aim of the analysis is to identify both explicit policy guidelines and implicit assumptions shaping CCIs education. Following Bowen (2009), the documents were systematically reviewed and compared to detect potential gaps between stated policy intentions and institutional discourse.

The second component consists of expert interviews. Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, which lasted from 45 to 120 minutes, with experts from ten Vietnamese universities offering CCIs-related programs and several organizations operating within the CCIs sector. Institutions were purposively selected based on their active involvement in CCI-related training, variation in institutional type (public and private), and their representation of different regional and disciplinary orientations within Vietnam's higher education landscape. This sampling strategy enables the study to capture diverse institutional responses to CCIs' policy agendas rather than focusing on a single model. The participants included faculty members, academic administrators, and industry professionals involved in program design, implementation, or workforce

engagement. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, recorded with consent, and anonymized (e.g., Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2).

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since the sample size was manageable, manual coding was selected, and each transcript was independently coded by each author to ensure analytical rigor. Following the initial coding, the authors systematically compared their codebooks, discussed discrepancies, and refined coding categories through iterative consensus-building. This process enhanced the consistency and credibility of the analysis, contributing to the overall validity of the findings. Transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurrent themes, patterns, and tensions, with particular attention given to the curriculum design, faculty development, infrastructural constraints, and conceptualizations of CCIs. This approach aligns with the use of expert interviews to capture insider perspectives and organizational logic that are often absent from formal documents (Littig & Puchta, 2015; Bogner *et al*., 2009). To ensure trustworthiness, the study employs methodological triangulation by integrating document analysis and interview data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consistencies and discrepancies between policy texts and practitioner accounts were systematically examined to enhance interpretive validity. Researcher reflexivity was maintained by critically reflecting on interpretive assumptions throughout the analytical process.

RESULTS

The political structure surrounding creative human resources

Vietnam's policy framework for the development of human resources in CCIs represents a significant change and an increasing level of state commitment at the national level. Creative human capital is now framed in government discourse as a “key factor” for competitiveness, and this priority is ingrained in key strategies. Although scale, coherence, and implementation still have weak spots, the war on scale, financial, public–private partnerships (PPPs), artist welfare, talent development, and capacity-building for cultural managers has been adopted on a large scale to achieve this objective and develop a cultural manager ecosystem.

The cornerstones are training and education. Following the call for the 2016 strategy (Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg) to create a nationwide network of institutions that provide graduates who are tech-savvy and ready for the market, vocational and college programs now cover all 12 CCIs fields, from advertising and architecture to fashion, film, and cultural tourism. Practice-linked learning is emphasized by policy, which calls for schools to promote digital adaptability, co-design curricula with businesses, and connect training with the creative market. To facilitate advancement from vocational tracks to university, the 2014 Vocational

Education Law required articulation between levels. Later plans, such as the cultural development plan in 2021 (Decision 1909/QĐ-TTg), put pressure on institutions to update their teaching methods and curricula. In this context, institutions of higher learning began to introduce courses in digital content, design, multimedia communications, fashion, cultural marketing, and extracurricular activities to increase awareness of the creative industry among students (Trần *et al.*, 2024).

There are still gaps despite these advancements. Specialized offerings are limited in several subsectors, expansion is uneven, and a cohesive vocational system is still developing. Student mobility is limited by the slow articulation between tracks across ministries and the unresolved issue of striking a balance between technical proficiency and creativity. Rollouts are made more difficult because of the uneven educational awareness of CCIs. According to analysts, this pillar is "gradually shaping up," but its scope and industry relevance are limited. They advocated for increased programs and better interministerial coordination.

Reforms in Vietnamese higher education aim to foster innovation, creativity, and interdisciplinarity. The National Education Development Strategy 2030, aiming to 2045 (Decision 1705/QĐ-TTg) and Resolution 29-NQ/TW (2013), reorient universities from rote learning to the development of "*comprehensive capacity and qualities of learners, especially creative ability, practical skills, self-study, and entrepreneurship.*" The 2016 cultural-industries strategy (Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg) positioned universities at the center of the ecosystem, urging new programs and closer cooperation between universities, institutes, and enterprises—an implicit "triple helix" connecting academia, industry, and the state. The recently amended Higher Education Law (2018) provided autonomy to open majors, create interdisciplinary curricula, collaborate globally, and combine research and creative practices to facilitate this.

Innovative universities have been offering degrees related to creative economy since the late 2010s. These include the Cultural Industry Management Program at Hanoi University of Culture, the Creative Media Program at the Academy of Journalism and Communication, the Creative Design Program at the University of Industrial Fine Arts, and the UX and digital content design suites at FPT University and RMIT Vietnam. Global practices are incorporated into curricula codeveloped with partners in South Korea, Japan, France, and the United Kingdom. The national education strategy by 2022 specifically included "cultural industries and digital transformation," directing universities to increase training in high-quality human resources and expand programs linked to innovation (Decision 131/QĐ-TTg, 2022).

Vietnam's policy continues to lag behind practice. The relationships between universities and businesses are not equal, disciplinary segregation still occurs, and real interdisciplinarity is not observed. Many programs do not have significant industry projects, internships, or practitioner-led instruction. Rigid

budgeting also prevents the production of inadequate financial and regulatory support by students and campuses such as studios, laboratories, or incubators. However, critics have put the reforms on the head of providing universities with a higher profile, arguing that they need interdisciplinary incentives and stronger links with industry to entrench improvements.

The second pillar is financial investment. In training and talent development, the Party and State favor different sources of funds through public, private, and foreign funds. Resolution 33/NQ-TW involves the creation of incentives to motivate businesses and individuals to invest in the arts and culture. Public cultural funds are permitted to promote training and innovation by the State Budget Law of 2015 and Decision 844/QĐ-TTg; tuition waivers, scholarships and stipends are reduced by instruments such as Decree 81/2021/NĐ-CP, Decision 82/2005/QĐ-TTg and Decision 41/2014/QĐ-TTg. In August 2024, Directive 30/CT-TTg requested the creation of a National Culture and Creative Industries Development Fund, indicating a move toward the state-only system of financing. Circular 54/2022/TT-BTC provides full financial support to national training in traditional theater and to national troupes, two flagship programs, the Overseas Arts Training Program to 2030 (Decision 1437/QĐ-TTg) and the Talent Training in Culture and Arts Project for 2016-2025 (Decision 1341/QĐ-TTg).

Nonetheless, the drawbacks are also remarkably recognized as diverted funding, constrained resources in niche sectors, and accounting discrepancies hindering access to international scholarships. There is no coordination or oversight of early funds, and innovative financing is in its infancy stage. Even though this is approved, a Creative Industries Development Fund is awaiting incentives and legislative structures. The lack of tax or credit policies will deter any effort by the private sector, and the conservatism of the administration will limit the willingness of risk-takers to take risks on experimental art. Experts should intensify PPPs, provide regional centers of innovation, provide tax incentives, and create a national database of creative people.

The third strand is multistakeholder collaboration and PPP. PPP is regarded as funding and governance innovations concerning the increasing need and the limited availability of governmental funds. Decree 35/2021/NĐ-CP made culture and education PPP eligible, which opened opportunities for collaborative projects in digital infrastructure, development of the creative industry, and education in arts. Furthermore, Directive 30/CT-TTg (2024) in the field of training and production emphasized the need to enhance collaboration among the state, enterprises, and social organizations.

In fact, PPP projects occurred early. Businesses also collaborate with public universities to design courses together and add internships, as is the case with the University of Industrial Fine Arts doing professional projects with design firms. VICAS also provides short programs in digital arts and cultural management in cooperation with the British Council and UNESCO. Cultural innovation hubs of

public and private co-management connect rapidly changing industry practices with academic institutions by connecting artists, entrepreneurs, start-ups, and universities. Examples of PPP in action include festivals, exhibitions, and film events organized with public and private sponsors. These are reflective of the potential in training, talent identification, and bridging theory and practice, even though they are in their infancy.

There are also welfare and incentive programs that focus on precarious artists, artisans and practitioners. The amended Cultural Heritage Law 2024 (Law No. 45/2024/QH15) supported the support of artisans, particularly the so-called living treasures of intangible heritage. Article 85(2) mandates that state policies reward and improve the living and creative conditions of artisans. Decree 62/2014/NĐ-CP and Decree 109/2015/NĐ-CP confer monthly allowances to state-titled artisans to allow them to maintain their profession and educate their heirs. Funding preference and recognition are provided by title systems such as the title of the Meritorious Artist and Peoples Artist. Whereas provincial testing has been performed in artist-in-residence at schools, localities have funded funds, subsidized studios or cosponsored exhibitions to match artisans with markets. The stipends of artisans who teach communities are described in Circular 01/2023/TT-BVHTTDL. They also use PPPs: universities and institutions also collaborate with private galleries, and businesses finance cultural events and master-apprentice programs.

Challenges remain as the criteria for state titles and benefits are often stringent or narrowly defined, which means that many practitioners, especially younger, emerging artists or those in new creative fields—fall through the cracks. For instance, numerous young folk musicians or artisans have not yet obtained years of service or official recognition to be awarded titles, leaving them ineligible for support, even though they are exactly the next generation that needs encouragement. This reveals a gap between policy intention and inclusivity. In addition, artists in Vietnam stand at risk because of low stipends and a lack of insurance for their creative work. Some of the proposed solutions include building a database of national artists, initiating jointly funded insurance or retirement schemes, and promoting PPP incentives to attract companies to invest in talent as part of their corporate social responsibility. The aim is to move away to long-term system-wide support as opposed to scattered support.

Another issue is the identification and development of talent. Young people who possess outstanding talent in the areas of art, design, media, film, and digital creativity are believed to be the key sources of advantage. Decision 1341/QĐ-TTg (2016), which demanded the establishment of exchanges, scholarships, grants and specialized programs, set the tone to invest, discover and nurture talent. To hire excellent pupils and collaborate with those worldwide, the Ministry of Culture and Education established classes committed to elite talent in major academic institutions such as the Vietnam National Academy of Music,

Hanoi University of Theatre and Cinema, and Vietnam University of Fine Arts. Decades have been given full scholarships by the state and international foundations since 2018. The British Council, Goethe-Institut, and KOFICE are the main partners of the short-term workshops, whose main topics include new media, design and cultural management.

The idea of creating incubation is a new policy. Directive 30/CT-TTg (2024) requires programs to identify and develop young talent, incorporate mentorship into entrepreneurship, and tie into start-up ecosystems. Creative hubs today mentor, seed funds, and connect promising creators to markets, often with the help of UNESCO and the British Council. The talent policy has risen to cover new sectors such as animation and game design, with the 2030 strategy emphasizing competition and showcases to identify young talent (Decision 1341/QĐ-TTg, 2016). Cultural agencies also simplify the process of obtaining permissions and co-fund travel to allow musicians and designers to attend international residencies. Even now, it is possible to note the deficiencies, as the fragile relations in the industry limit commercialization, choice may be based more on the classic achievements rather than the portfolios, and the resources are still concentrated in the governmental institutions. Some of the proposed changes involve increasing international collaboration, adopting portfolio-based reviews as the selection method, and investing internationally in PPPs.

The final pillar is the enhancement of the capacity of educators and cultural managers. Training lecturers in CCIs was a priority in the amendment of the Higher Education Law in 2018 (Article 60.1). To be more specific, Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg (2016) suggested more international cooperation by training teams of managers, experts, and lecturers, whereas Decision 4149/QĐ-BVHTTDL (2020) for 2021-2030 is devoted to leadership, management, and digital skills. Universities have also started to introduce training in creative lecturing, with a focus on applied research and interdisciplinary knowledge. Accordingly, the 2016–2025 Capacity-Building Scheme (Decision 1341/QĐ-TTg) was dedicated to retraining in management, law, marketing, and business. A significant number of universities had faculty members go abroad on their own to receive short training, and the faculty members returned to adapt new techniques. The outcomes are optimistic since faculty improved their research and established contact with business, and cultural managers asserted that they were more exposed to business models of governance and were equipped to undertake projects. International cooperation promotes professionalization; nonetheless, many assessments involve actions and not outcomes, and training is not well structured and has no single competency model. VICAS *et al.*'s proceedings (2022) indicate that 68% of Vietnamese lecturers in this field have not participated in international training programs or research exchange fellowships, revealing that professional development is still not encouraged and that connections between businesses, government, and institutions remain vaguely defined.

Altogether, the CCI human resources policy architecture of Vietnam has evolved in terms of being an idealistic vision for systematic, although disproportional, implementation. Education reform, greater autonomy in universities, the diversification of funds, PPP systems, welfare policy, nurturing of talent, and capacity building have become interlinked. Fragmented financing, rigid administration, slow correspondence, uneven involvement and unequal welfare and talent choices are all right contradictions. To overcome these frictions, deeper practice-based collaborations, flexible funding that has private incentives, flexible competency frameworks, and portfolio-based talent discoveries are all needed. When Vietnam and the international community collaborate, it can reinforce the human foundations of its CCIs and make them a sustainable source of economic value, cultural luster and soft power.

Current Situation of the CCI Programs in Vietnamese Higher Education

Ambiguity in Concept when CCIs are Defined

The fact that there is no agreement on what should constitute CCIs in higher education in Vietnam is a starting discovery. The idea of CCIs remains to be developed and is not particularly old in the academic debate. Some of its charms include innovation, interdisciplinarity and cultural relevance, yet most of the educators do not have a clear understanding of its boundaries or how to transform the idea into harmonized curricula. A senior lecturer at Hanoi Open University stated *the following:*

"One finds this term to be very innovative and novel. The phrase "cultural and creative industries" itself suggests that we are discussing creative individuals; it feels very fresh and fits well with those trailblazing organizations that are creating new knowledge and taking very different paths."

Interviewee 1 (Hanoi Open University)

That observation is reflected in institutional reality. There is no program at Hanoi Open University that completely incorporates CCIs; rather, several majors *"orient toward* it" in part. This pattern is common: universities may host art, design, media, or tourism programs that are related to CCIs, but these programs are frequently treated as conventional disciplinary silos rather than integrated "creative industry" programs. The closest is industrial design, which until recently remained aligned with traditional applied-art training and "*still follow[ed] the old path, without any breakthrough in the new direction of the 4.0 era.*" Because of this, the idea is frequently added to already-existing fields without a comprehensive framework, leading to local experiments rather than systematized models.

The interviewees expressed varying perspectives on CCIs, highlighting the difficulty in achieving uniformity. A conservatory administrator described CCIs as follows:

"A very comprehensive category, on a national scale… very difficult to define concretely and extremely broad—sometimes not immediately visible, even intangible, but with very clear impacts."

Interviewee 4 (Hanoi National Conservatory)

Others emphasized the intersectoral nature of CCIs; a veteran arts dean argued that development necessitates cooperation between government, industry, and universities, characterized as follows:

"*A symbiotic relationship… if we only work in isolation, it is very difficult [to grow] and cannot develop on a large scale [as every art form now combines technology and training legacy].*"

Interviewee 5 (Hanoi University of Industrial Arts)

Academic leaders acknowledged that even experts find it difficult to draw clear boundaries between artistic, technological, and business content; overlaps make this particularly difficult for individuals with training in narrow disciplinary traditions. Most people agree that Vietnam is still in its infancy:

"We are at the beginning, having to learn by doing and experiencing in practice, then gradually formulating a more thorough and complete understanding of CCIs in Vietnam."

Interviewee 6 (FPT University)

In brief, CCIs are generally regarded as an exciting, globally aligned idea, but the domain's breadth and cross-cutting nature result in varying interpretations and a lack of a unified curricular definition.

Curriculum Development: Moving Toward Multidisciplinary and Updated Courses

Several universities have updated and expanded their curricula in response to labor market signals and policy cues. Notably, the University of Culture in Ho Chi Minh City opened an undergraduate specialization specifically named "Cultural Industries" in 2018. According to a senior administrator, the initiative needed careful planning and was a deliberate response to national strategy:

"The Prime Minister's Decision 1755/QĐ-TTg, which approved the strategy to develop cultural industries by 2020 with a vision to 2030, served as the basis for the program's development, which was driven by practical needs. After holding meetings, the university assigned the faculty of cultural studies to first create a specialization to examine the problem of human resource development to comply with this government strategy. We would open a full cultural industry major after setting up all the prerequisites, including facilities, a staff of lecturers, human resources, and the training curriculum."

Interviewee 2 (Ho Chi Minh City University of Culture)

For peer institutions considering comparable actions, this trajectory—core disciplinary strength enhanced by interdisciplinary CCIs content, directed by explicit outcomes around cultural knowledge, creative-industry skills, and sustainable development—has emerged as a model.

Reform in other areas focuses on modernizing established arts and design programs to incorporate innovation, technology, and closer industry ties. Traditionally focused on fine arts, the University of Arts, Hue added photography, digital art, and video art in 2010 along with multimedia design (as shared by Interviewee 7). The design school Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts, established in 1949, concluded that some of its traditional curricula were out of step with changing technology and field dynamics. In addition to developing new programs that are in line with real-world demands beyond traditional specializations, it has moved the focus from hand-rendered techniques to creative thinking and proficiency with digital tools. In addition, lecturers are updating their pedagogical approaches and references by using global resources from the U.S., Japan, Italy, and other countries in place of outdated resources.

However, progress is still not uniform. An internal review conducted in 2022 at Hanoi Open University revealed that related programs (design, tourism, and IT) were *"following the same old* grooves" (Interviewee 1). The university completely redesigned its curriculum for majors in design, but it was challenging to promote a subspecialty to a new major without consistent investments in skilled staff and facilities. These findings demonstrate that CCI reform requires institutional vision, governance alignment, and resource commitments and extends beyond simply updating curricula. As a result, rather than fully implementing integrated models, many programs are only *"approaching or nearly reaching the essence of* CCIs" (Interviewee 1).

Private colleges with close ties to business, on the other hand, have advanced more quickly. Particularly in the fields of software engineering and digital entertainment (game development), highlighted in Vietnam's cultural industry agenda, FPT University has integrated aspects of the creative industry with its technology and design majors. In addition to focusing on practical projects, internships and other real-world activities, a curriculum is based on international

standards (ACM and ABET) and is regularly revised to factor in the trends in social media, mobile, data, analytics, and cloud computing. Since graduates obtain employment opportunities even before they complete their degrees, employers also respond accordingly. The conclusion is obvious: programs that purposefully combine entrepreneurship, technology, and the arts with organized exposure to business practices yield results that are valued in CCI labor markets. Although curriculum reform is generally accelerating, different institutional approaches, levels of governance, and available resources cause variations in their pace and depth.

Resource Limitations and Infrastructure Deficits

The infrastructure for creative practice is the most obvious practical bottleneck across all institutions. The pedagogy of CCI relies on specialized studios, maker labs, performance spaces, sound stages, edited suites, and equipment that needs to be modern and sufficient. Owing to a lack of such facilities or strict operating guidelines, many universities have fewer pedagogical options and must rely more on outside placements. As pointed out by Interview 1, standard rooms are *"just sufficient," whereas "specialized practice rooms are very limited and missing equipment". In industrial design, "aside from one room with sewing machines, there are currently no workshops for graphic [design] or interior [design]*," which limits experiential learning and iterative prototyping, which are essential components of creative training. The design and tourism facilities at Hanoi Open University also lack dedicated buildings and rental facilities for some classes. While industry projects and internships serve as a valuable form of compensation, particularly in the tourism industry, they cannot completely replace the regular studio-based pedagogy that takes place on campuses.

There is capacity pressure on even the most esteemed arts institutions. In response to the growing demand for design education, Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts has increased its annual enrollment from approximately 30 in the early 1990s to approximately 450 in the present. Since public institutions cannot grow on their own, adding sites or extending the campus requires ministerial support. Leadership acknowledges that the current campus *"will not be able to meet the needs of the development* strategy" (Interviewee 5) and that physical space has not kept up. State funding for public universities typically falls short of the capital requirements of contemporary creative programs. Despite rising expectations, the National Conservatory, which is entirely state-funded, finds it difficult to pay for new facilities or technological advancements. The director makes the case for public–private collaboration, or *"state-and-people working* together" (Interviewee 4), to draw in funding for research, creative projects, equipment, halls, studios, and digital labs. While this model aligns incentives, it

necessitates careful policy design to leverage private capital while protecting the public mission.

The flexibility of private institutions is relatively high. Although students are required to bring their own laptops, FPT University boasts a well-equipped campus, small class sizes (approximately 25), and adequate infrastructure. In contrast, the public sector has the greatest infrastructure gap since timely upgrades are hampered by funding shortages and bureaucratic processes (as shared by Interviewees 11–QV Press). The ability to provide experiential, state-of-the-art CCIs training will continue to be limited in the absence of focused investment in creative spaces, and reliance on temporary solutions—rentals, off-site projects—will persist.

Issues with Faculty Capacity and Human Resources

The key factor that determines the quality of CCIs is faculty capacity. One systemic bottleneck is the lack of lecturers who integrate industry awareness, interdisciplinary fluency, and creative practice. The lack of professional development pipelines and recognition frameworks that undervalue practice-based scholarships were frequently brought up by respondents as problems with recruitment and retention.

Human resources were cited as having led to the fall of tourism management, which is a flagship project at Hanoi Open University: the production of future lecturers failed to meet professional expectations, and a large proportion of experienced lecturers were either retiring or leaving. Weak exposure to new knowledge and pedagogy resulted from the university losing experienced professors and PhDs, hiring practices that were opaque and ineffective, and a lack of investment in developing young scholars—sending promising lecturers overseas "*was not given attention*." The effects on employability and program quality were as follows:

"The primary cause of [the] decline is that the practical demands have not been met by human resources." The necessary expertise has not been met by the lecturers of the next generation. For a variety of reasons, many well-known senior lecturers retired or ceased teaching. Furthermore, the strategy of investing in young, talented faculty members—such as sending young lecturers abroad for advanced training—was not given enough consideration. As a result, we were unable to access fresh sources of information in the field, which caused the quality of our instruction to decline and fall short of the increasingly demanding standards of both students and the businesses that hired our graduates.

Interviewee 1 (Hanoi Open University)

Arts colleges are also undergoing a generational shift. Many professors who received training in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union decades ago are retiring, and few qualified successors exist. When their earnings exceeded their academic salaries, recent graduates often opt for careers in the industry or as freelancers (as shared by Interviewee 9–Hanoi Architectural University). Practice-based outputs are not fully acknowledged as equivalent research for promotion, and doctoral pathways in some art and design fields have been restricted domestically. As a result, there is a shortage of PhD holders and a discrepancy between the demands of creative work and the qualifications needed.

Hiring is further restricted by public pay scales. The problem was succinctly expressed by a senior manager at Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts:

"The greatest barrier for a public institution that lacks financial autonomy is that its welfare and salary levels are incomparable to those of non-public or autonomous public schools. It is very challenging to hire top talent in the nation under the current pay scale, and it is even more difficult to draw in foreign-trained workers. (This is an issue the university is working on to resolve.) If individuals study abroad at their own family's expense, returning to a state-prescribed salary is very unappealing, except for lecturers sent overseas under government programs who are legally required to return.

Interviewee 3 (Hanoi University of Industrial Fine Arts)

This statement highlights a larger policy issue: public compensation is insufficient for the internationally trained talent required to modernize CCI's pedagogy, potentially leading to brain drain to private institutions or foreign markets. While some colleges are experimenting under pressure by giving returnees preferential treatment, enhancing workplaces, and providing flexible work schedules, long-term change would necessitate greater freedom to determine pay and create incentive plans.

Private organizations are more agile. In addition to encouraging doctoral study, including support for part-time or overseas programs, and keeping teaching loads manageable so that lecturers can continue practicing, FPT University employs industry professionals with master's degrees for application-oriented teaching and PhDs for research-oriented roles. Even private schools admit that hiring in specialized creative fields can be difficult, but these steps, along with more competitive pay, help staff in-demand specializations.

Another detectable issue is recognition and professional growth. Practice-based artistic work is not fully recognized as scholarly output in the academic promotion system for music and fine arts. Exhibitions, curated works, and creative performances frequently fall short of peer-reviewed publications, which put academic artists at *"a barrier and* disadvantage". (Interviewee 10 – Hanoi

University of Fine Arts). As a result, practitioners are less motivated to teach, and those who do have fewer opportunities for advancement. To better reflect the knowledge production modes of CCIs and promote a more robust talent pipeline, national standards should be brought into line with international norms, where creative practice is considered research in art and design.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The evidence assembled in this study does not, on first reading, point toward a single or simple explanation. Vietnamese universities have responded to the CCIs' agenda across multiple dimensions (revising curricula, establishing new programs, signing international partnerships, and developing faculty capacity), and the pace of formal change, measured against the baseline of a decade ago, is real. However, the qualitative evidence reveals that formal change and operational transformation are not the same and that the distance between them is not random. It follows a pattern that neo-institutional theory would predict: coercive pressure, produced by the national policy apparatus from Decision 1755 onward, has succeeded in generating formal alignment. Programs carry new names, and policy language has been absorbed into institutional discourse. What has changed more slowly, in some cases, has not changed at all, is the technical core: the faculty incentive systems, the assessment criteria, the infrastructure allocation decisions, and the disciplinary boundaries that actually determine what students learn and what academic staff are rewarded for doing.

This is what Gorostidi and Rubio-Arostegui (2026) characterize, in their synthesis of the quality reform literature, as symbolic compliance rather than structural convergence, and it is visible in the interview data assembled here. They are structurally produced responses to an environment that rewards the adoption of CCIs symbols without yet creating the conditions under which those symbols could be given operational content. Salvador and Comunian (2024) report that under genuine uncertainty about how to achieve new institutional goals imitating successful external models is the rational response, since imitation is less risky than differentiation. For Vietnamese universities navigating an agenda without domestic precedent, this is precisely the dynamic the evidence reveals.

Prominent universities need to rethink their function. They will be able to become centers of knowledge and innovation where technologists, artists, and entrepreneurs can be united on the basis of their basic competencies. In internal analysis, universities cease to be towers and begin to be drivers of creativity when they go beyond the classroom and the city and create common spaces and cultural events and community projects (Griffith, 2023). The promotion of innovative curricula and partnerships by flagship institutions will create the next generation of innovative entrepreneurs that will characterize identity and competitiveness in Vietnam, where a young workforce is an important strategic resource. Thus,

instead of imitating conventional templates, leading universities should be left free and resourceful enough to initiate new clusters.

This reorientation results in a conflict between a new mission and a new academic tradition. Although interdisciplinarity, flexibility, and entrepreneurial attitudes are needed in creative industries, conventional universities are less concerned with disciplinary knowledge and predetermined results. Programs should remain rigorous and ensure that graduates learn digital tools and business skills, neither of which are typically placed at the center of a traditional curriculum. Although combining these areas is advised by experts, the existing practice often separates cultural theory (learning to know) and professional practice (learning to do). These should be included in vocational modules to make the students technically competent and critical at the same time. Entrepreneurship and technology literacy should be mandatory in a creative economy where most people's freelance, start-up, and business skills, along with digital labs, are courses and disciplines found in arts and media programs. Practically, this would be through offering an improved studio to art students with the latest hardware and software and necessary project management, financial planning and marketing. Because creative work is increasingly closely connected with professional self-management and digital capabilities, bridging the gap in organization and commercial skills reported by graduates is necessary.

Vietnamese policymakers have traditionally been looking to other nations as a source of inspiration to adapt to fast-changing industries. Higher education should thus cease to simply produce graduates but be creative in creating citizens with a spirit of curiosity, resilience and lifelong learning. Despite maintaining a rigid system of examination, China promotes a creative university to recruit talent, but Zhang *et al.* (2023) note that the reliance on the exam, which is also present in Vietnam, can subdue creativity. The cultural strategy of Japan and South Korea is combined with technology and international marketing, which emphasizes the content industry, which includes film, games, music and animation as the drivers of soft power (Cool Japan, K-Pop). Whereas the German studio pedagogy emphasizes open-ended trial and error, in the sense that no results can be entirely specified, entrepreneurship modules and incubators are part of many programs in art and design in Europe and the U.S. Startup and management coursework is also included in UK universities. Although the case in Vietnam has its own patterns, these instances demonstrate that it is possible to do the following: institutionalize practice-based PhDs, fund student-run studios, and create academies with industry connections. Rather than copying the programs that have been inherited over the generations, the trick is to connect the curricula to real-world creative ecosystems and global standards.

This analysis contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that applies institutional theory to the study of creative industry education in non-Western contexts (Keane, 2013; Flew, 2012), extending it in two specific directions. First,

it demonstrates that the decoupling dynamic is not merely a transitional or developmental phenomenon—an early-stage problem that more resources or more time will resolve—but is reproduced structurally by the very mechanisms through which CCIs reform is pursued. When a national strategy rewards formal adoption (reported compliance with Decision 1755, establishing nominally CCIs-aligned programs) rather than operational transformation (restructured faculty incentives, genuinely interdisciplinary curricula, practice-based research recognition), institutions are in effect rewarded for decoupling. The policy architecture and the institutional response are co-produced. Second, the Vietnamese case complicates the assumption, which is common in the entrepreneurial university literature, that institutional isomorphism in higher education necessarily moves from periphery to center and that reforms initiated at the margins (pilot programs, international partnerships, individual faculty champions) gradually reshape the institutional core. Instead, this study reveals that reform pressures are absorbed and neutralized at the periphery: new programs acquire CCIs-adjacent titles without reorganizing their internal content; industry partnerships exist as formal structures without transforming pedagogy; and international collaboration produces returnee faculty who remain professionally marginalized within unchanged promotion systems. At this stage, Vietnam's creative turn is a turn in orientation—in the direction the policy system is facing—more than a turn in operation. Closing that gap is the substantive challenge the final section now addresses.

Practical implications should also be considered. To assist students in blending the arts with business, digital and analytical abilities, universities should establish interdisciplinary pathways that cut across faculties, including joint majors in cultural entrepreneurship, creative technology, or media strategy. When the aim is to facilitate such programs, silos will have to be broken by committees. One of the elements of the curriculum should be stakeholder partnerships; practitioners are expected to codesign or lecture on projects that also involve cultural businesses, NGOs, or government organizations. The collaboration processes must be simplified so that people can participate in it-UK models often impose administrative pressure on universities instead of artists. Sole academic agendas should be replaced by co-created projects, i.e., in capstones, where artists and entrepreneurs collectively specify results with equal intellectual property sharing. The value of creative-practice research can be demonstrated by universities establishing practice-based labs or studios that are collaboratively run by faculty and students to address real-world problems that yield research outputs and portfolios. Lifelong learning structures that can be used to increase awareness of the need to develop new media, technological, and market trends among workers should be fostered as short courses, micro-credentials, and public workshops.

Assessment and institutional incentives are also in need of change. There is a need to increase the application of conventional metrics, including publications and thesis credits. Colleges should shift to metrics of “third mission” that are

incentivizing, including collaboration, impact on local creative economies, campus-wide student employment, and campus cultural vitality. Performance selection may consist of cultural events or incubated startups, which are graded. To facilitate the process of the commercialization of a project, leadership may also create seed funds or entrepreneurship grants to show that innovativeness in instruction and volunteer work is no less important than academic performance.

Vietnamese higher education is also faced with systemic constraints. The strictly defined system of degrees and the exam system, which is deeply embedded in the system, is not conducive to fast and creative learning. The campuses do not have spaces for innovation, labs, galleries and faculty qualifications, which is a bottleneck, as one study indicated that most of the lecturers who were trained on narrow models more than 30 years ago lacked experience in digital, entrepreneurship and international environments. Surveys indicate that a lack of modernization is caused by the fact that most arts faculties have failed to undertake training in the creative industry. These limitations are challenges that require repositioning. University networks and the government might assist in the experimental stage of new models by providing more budget and curriculum autonomy to universities. Joint clusters can share costly resources such as makerspaces and digital labs to address resource shortages. The idea of co-teaching programs with other foreign institutions or rotating faculty between industry and campuses are two ways in which governance should be reconsidered, where creativity and responsiveness become core values. It is meant to transform education itself into creative practice through aligning the universities with the creative economy.

CONCLUSIONS

We argued that diversity and growing pains are defining features of Vietnam's higher education system in relation to CCIs. The increasing engagement of universities across the country in developing talent for the cultural and creative sectors signals the rising importance of CCIs within Vietnam's broader development trajectory. However, the qualitative findings reveal several persistent challenges that may constrain the realization of this potential. A continuing lack of conceptual clarity regarding CCIs in academic contexts may hinder coherent program design, while ongoing efforts to modernize legacy curricula and introduce interdisciplinary content remain uneven and insufficiently supported. Structural constraints are also evident in limited access to facilities, technology, and industry partnerships, particularly within public institutions. Most critically, the shortage of qualified faculty and the difficulty of attracting and retaining innovative educators represent significant long-term concerns.

Addressing these gaps will require coordinated efforts between universities and policymakers, including sustained investment in infrastructure, the

development of clearer academic frameworks for CCIs, and human resource policies that actively support academic creativity. Only through such measures can higher education institutions fully function, as one respondent noted, as "*both the training ground and the creative space where ideas start and the skilled workforce to realize them is provided*" (Interviewee 8 - University of Theater and Performing Arts of Hanoi).

From an institutional isomorphism perspective (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), these developments may also reflect emerging pressures toward convergence, as universities adopt similar CCIs programs in response to policy expectations, professional norms, and perceived models of success. However, in the absence of adequate resources and internal alignment, such convergence risks remain largely symbolic rather than substantively transformative. Nevertheless, these dynamics also suggest that with more coordinated policy support, institutional learning, and the cultivation of globally oriented academic leadership (Archer & Zhang, 2021), CCIs education in Vietnam remains well positioned to evolve toward more contextually grounded and genuinely innovative models in the years ahead.

Conflicts of Interest
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