



The position of Vietnam's social sciences and humanities in the context of international integration - An analysis from postgraduate training policies

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Abstract

This article analyzes the position of Vietnam's social sciences and humanities in the context of international integration, based on updated 2026 data from the QS World University Rankings, Scopus database, and recent policy documents. The study employs the research ecosystem and higher education internationalization theoretical frameworks to compare Vietnam with four ASEAN countries including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines across three indicator groups: inputs including training policies, processes including international collaboration, and outputs including international publications and university rankings. Results show that although the number of Vietnamese higher education institutions in international rankings has increased significantly, the proportion of international publications in the social sciences and humanities field remains modest compared to regional leading countries, particularly in terms of international collaboration rates. In the context of Resolution 59-NQ/TW of 2025 which defines the shift of international integration from reception to contribution, the article analyzes Hanoi's draft policy supporting doctoral training, identifying its strengths and limitations compared to the region. Accordingly, the study proposes three groups of recommendations to enhance the position of Vietnam's social sciences and humanities, contributing to the successful implementation of the Party's strategic orientation in the new era of integration.

Keywords: Social sciences and humanities, international integration, Resolution 59-NQ/TW, postgraduate training, ASEAN.

Introduction

In the context of a rapidly and complexly changing world, international integration has become an important factor in improving quality and promoting breakthroughs in social sciences and humanities research. Complex transnational issues such as climate change, social inequality, and digital transformation require coordinated and interdisciplinary solutions, in which social sciences and humanities play an essential role in providing deep understanding of social, cultural and political aspects.

In Vietnam, the Party and State have consistently identified science and technology development as a top national priority. On January 24, 2025 ^[1], the Politburo issued Resolution 59-NQ/TW on international integration in the new situation, described by General Secretary To Lam (2025) as a breakthrough decision, marking a historic turning point in the country's integration process. The Resolution defines international integration shifting from reception to contribution, from extensive integration to full integration, from the position of a lagging nation to a state of rising and pioneering in new fields. However, the question arises as to where the position of Vietnam's social sciences and humanities currently stands internationally, compared to countries in the Southeast Asian region, whether Vietnam is approaching or falling behind, and whether current postgraduate training policies are appropriate for enhancing social sciences and humanities research capacity in the context of implementing Resolution 59-NQ/TW. This article aims to answer three main research questions. First, what is the position of Vietnam's social sciences and humanities measured by international publications and university rankings compared to four ASEAN countries including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines as of 2026. Second, does Hanoi City's draft policy supporting one thousand doctoral trainees meet

the requirements for enhancing social sciences and humanities research capacity in the context of implementing Resolution 59-NQ/TW. Third, from the experience of ASEAN countries, how should Vietnam adjust policies to successfully implement the orientation of shifting from reception to contribution in international integration of social sciences and humanities.

Theoretical framework

This study employs the research ecosystem theoretical framework based on the works of Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) ^[4] on the Triple Helix model and Carayannis and Campbell (2019) ^[2] on extension to the Quadruple Helix. Accordingly, a country's social sciences and humanities research capacity depends not only on financial investment or the number of scientists, but is also the result of interaction between three actors including the state with policies and institutions, universities with training and research facilities, and enterprises or society with application needs and labor markets (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000) ^[4]. Applying this framework to assess the position of social sciences and humanities, the article analyzes three groups of indicators including inputs as postgraduate training policies, scholarship levels, output requirements and financial resources, processes as international collaboration in research and academic networks, and outputs as international publications in prestigious journals and the rankings of higher education institutions.

Additionally, the theory of higher education internationalization by Knight (2004, 2022) ^[11, 12] defines internationalization as the process of integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into the goals, functions and delivery of educational services (Knight, 2004 ^[11], p.11). De Wit *et al.* (2023) emphasize

that in the post-pandemic context, internationalization is a mandatory requirement for higher education institutions wishing to assert their position (de Wit, Altbach & Rumbley, 2023). For social sciences and humanities, internationalization manifests through three main forms including bilateral and multilateral research cooperation, international publications in prestigious journals, and exchange of lecturers and researchers.

This article uses this framework to analyze the rate of international collaboration in social sciences and humanities publications of Vietnam and ASEAN countries. Resolution 59-NQ/TW of 2025^[3] identifies three important shifts in international integration thinking including shifting from reception to contribution, from extensive integration to full integration, from the position of a lagging nation to a state of rising and pioneering in new fields (To Lam, 2025)^[24]. For social sciences and humanities, this orientation requires not only absorbing knowledge from the world, but also creating theoretical contributions and doctrines of international reference value based on Vietnamese practice. This shift is entirely consistent with the development logic of the research ecosystem, where countries in the early stage are usually recipients, then later move towards co-creating knowledge.

Research methodology

The study employs a qualitative comparative multiple case study design following the method of Ragin (2014)^[21], combined with secondary data analysis from authoritative

sources. Five countries selected for comparison include Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, based on criteria of being ASEAN members, having higher education systems developed at different levels, and having available and reliable data. For postgraduate training policy analysis, the study focuses on the case of Hanoi City and compares with policies of corresponding capitals or states including Bangkok of Thailand, Kuala Lumpur of Malaysia, and Singapore.

Secondary data was collected from four main sources. First, university rankings from QS World University Rankings 2026 published on June 19, 2025^[19, 25] and QS Asia University Rankings 2026 published on November 4, 2025 (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025a^[19, 25], 2025b). Second, international publications from Scopus and Web of Science databases for the period 2020 to 2025^[1], along with data from the Network of Vietnamese Social Sciences (NVSS) Project. This is an open science database project initiated and implemented by the AI Social Data Lab (under Vuong & Associates Office) since 2017 (period 2008 to 2018). Third, postgraduate training policies from Hanoi City's draft Resolution on supporting one thousand doctoral trainees (Hanoi People's Committee, 2026)^[7] and policies from other countries including RMUTT of Thailand, MyBrain 15 of Malaysia, A*STAR PhD Scholarship of Singapore. Fourth, policy documents and academic literature related to the research content.

Research results

Table 1: Vietnamese universities in QS World University Rankings 2026^[19]

| No. | University Name | QS WUR 2026 Rank | QS Asia 2026 ^[20] Rank | Change from 2025 |
|-----|---|------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Duy Tan University | 482 | 158 | Up 25 places |
| 2 | Ton Duc Thang University | 684 | 165 | Up 18 places |
| 3 | Vietnam National University, Hanoi | 761-770 | 175 | Up 32 places |
| 4 | Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City | 801-850 | 231 | Up 15 places |
| 5 | Van Lang University | 1001-1200 | 287 | New |
| 6 | Hanoi University of Science and Technology | 1201-1400 | 318 | Unchanged |
| 7 | Can Tho University | 1201-1400 | 355 | New |
| 8 | Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City | 1201-1400 | 437 | New |
| 9 | Hue University | 1401+ | 493 | Up 25 places |
| 10 | University of Da Nang | 1401+ | 607 | New |

Source: Compiled from QS WUR 2026 (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025a) and QS Asia University Rankings 2026 (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025b)^[19, 25]

Results from Table 1 show that Vietnam has ten higher education institutions in the QS WUR 2026 rankings, an increase of four universities compared to 2025^[25] (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025a; Vietnam News Agency, 2025)^[1]. Duy Tan University holds the highest position with rank 482, followed by Ton Duc Thang University with rank 684, Vietnam National University, Hanoi with ranks 761 to 770, and Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City

with ranks 801 to 850. New universities appearing in the 2026^[19] rankings include Van Lang University, Can Tho University, Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City and University of Da Nang. Analysis of component indicators from QS Asia 2026^[20] shows strengths in citations and international research networks of Vietnamese universities, but academic reputation indicators remain low (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025b).

Table 2: Number of ASEAN universities in QS WUR 2026^[19] rankings

| Country | Number | Highest Rank | Highest Ranked University |
|-------------|--------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| Malaysia | 32 | 60 | Universiti Malaya |
| Indonesia | 26 | 201-250 | Universitas Indonesia |
| Thailand | 15 | 211 | Chulalongkorn University |
| Vietnam | 10 | 482 | Duy Tan University |
| Philippines | 6 | 401-450 | University of the Philippines |
| Singapore | 4 | 8 | National University of Singapore |

Source: QS WUR 2026 (Quacquarelli Symonds, 2025a)

Comparing with ASEAN countries through Table 2, Vietnam ranks fourth in number of higher education institutions ranked, after Malaysia with thirty-two institutions, Indonesia with twenty-six institutions and Thailand with fifteen institutions. However, the quality gap

remains very large as Singapore has two universities in the global top fifteen, Malaysia has a university in the top sixty, Thailand has a university in the top two hundred eleven, while Vietnam's highest ranked university is only at four hundred eighty-two.

Table 3: International publications in social sciences and humanities in selected ASEAN countries, period 2020-2025 [6]

| Country | Proportion of SSH publications to total | Average Q1 articles per year | International collaboration rate |
|-------------|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Singapore | 24.30% | 872 | 65% to 70% |
| Malaysia | 36.80% | 678 | 55% to 60% |
| Thailand | 29.50% | 412 | 45% to 50% |
| Vietnam | 13.70% | 92 | 30% to 35% |
| Philippines | 11.20% | 68 | 25% to 30% |
| Indonesia | 16.40% | 134 | 35% to 40% |

Source: Author's calculations from Scopus, Web of Science accessed March 10, 2026, Ministry of Science and Technology (2025), Scimago (2025) [1, 23]

Data from Table 3 shows that Vietnam's proportion of social sciences and humanities publications only reaches 13.7% of total publications, significantly lower than Malaysia's 36.8% and Thailand's 29.5% (Scopus, 2025; Web of Science, 2025 [1, 14]; Ministry of Science and Technology, 2025) [1]. Vietnam's average number of Q1 articles per year is 92 articles, only 22% of Thailand's 412 articles and 13.5% of Malaysia's 678 articles. The rate of international collaboration in social sciences and humanities research in Vietnam is 30% to 35%, lower than Singapore's 65% to 70%, Malaysia's 55% to 60%, and Thailand's 45% to 50%. Data from the NVSS Project records for the period 2008 to 2018, Vietnam had 1070 authors collaborating with 1344 foreign authors, publishing 1937 articles in Scopus-indexed journals, with the top one percent of authors contributing 21.76% of total output (Pham Hiep *et al.*, 2019) [17]. Notably, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities,

Vietnam National University, Hanoi currently has 200 international publications annually, with nearly 100 Scopus and Web of Science articles, and the proportion of lecturers with doctoral degrees reaches 82%, aiming for the target of 100% by 2045 (Hoang Tra, 2025) [10]. Cause analysis shows that Vietnam's low publication rate can be explained by three main factors. First, the research investment structure prioritizes natural sciences and engineering fields to serve industrialization (Ministry of Science and Technology, 2025) [1]. Second, foreign language capacity and writing skills of social sciences and humanities lecturers remain limited, with the proportion achieving IELTS 6.5 standard not yet high. Third, the domestic journal system recognized by Scopus and Web of Science remains very limited, restricting publication opportunities and experience accumulation for scientists.

Table 4: Comparison of doctoral training support policies for social sciences and humanities in ASEAN capitals

| Criteria | Hanoi (Vietnam) | Bangkok (Thailand) | Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) | Singapore |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Program Name | Support for one thousand doctoral trainees draft 2026 [7]-2030 | RMUTT PhD Scholarship | MyBrain 15 nationwide application | A*STAR PhD Scholarship |
| Monthly scholarship level | 15 million VND equivalent 600 USD | 25,000 Baht equivalent 720 USD | 3,000 Ringgit equivalent 680 USD | 3,200 SGD equivalent 2,400 USD |
| International publication support | 100% fee for Q1 or Q2 articles | Up to 80% fee | 100% fee and bonus | 100% fee and bonus |
| Overseas internship support | 50 million VND per year equivalent 2,000 USD | 100,000 Baht per year equivalent 2,900 USD | 10,000 Ringgit per year equivalent 2,300 USD | Separate program |
| Publication requirement for SSH | One Q1 or Q2 article or one international book chapter | Two Scopus articles | Two Scopus or Web of Science articles | Two to three Q1 articles |
| Foreign language requirement | IELTS 6.5 or higher | TOEFL iBT 80 | IELTS 6.0 | IELTS 7.0 |

Note: Hanoi's policy is currently in draft form according to Hanoi City (2026) [7], subject to change when officially issued. Singapore's A*STAR PhD Scholarship program has support levels and publication requirements according to official regulations (A*STAR, 2025). Source: Hanoi City (2026), RMUTT (2025), MyBrain 15 (2025), A*STAR (2025) [3, 7]

Regarding postgraduate training policies through the case of Hanoi City, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences currently maintains cooperative relations with over forty international scientific agencies and organizations, including major funding partners such as Toyota Foundation, Japan Foundation, Ford Foundation, UNDP, WB, ADB and JICA (Nguyen Thanh Ha, 2025). From 1978 to 2003, the Academy trained four hundred sixty-six doctors and five hundred seventy-two masters, an impressive figure demonstrating the sector's internal capacity in the early development stage (Nguyen Cam Ngoc, 2024) [16]. Hanoi City's draft policy supporting one thousand doctoral trainees

for the period 2026 [7] to 2030, presented in Table 4, has notable strengths including clear output requirements with one Q1 or Q2 article or one international book chapter, IELTS 6.5 foreign language standard appropriate for integration requirements, and full publication support encouraging doctoral candidates to publish internationally (Hanoi People's Committee, 2026) [7]. However, compared to regional countries, the scholarship level of 15 million VND equivalent to approximately 600 USD per month is only 83% of Bangkok's 720 USD, 88% of Kuala Lumpur's 680 USD, and 25% of Singapore's 2,400 USD. Vietnam's publication requirement of one Q1 or Q2 article is also

lower than Thailand's requirement of two Scopus articles, Malaysia's requirement of two Scopus or Web of Science articles, and Singapore's requirement of two to three Q1 articles.

Regarding challenges in enhancing the position of social sciences and humanities, the study identifies four main challenges. First is inadequate investment, according to Mr. Ta Minh Tuan, Vice President of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, investment in social sciences and humanities is decreasing, policies often originate from requirements of natural sciences and technology rather than social sciences and humanities (Hoang Giang, 2024) ^[9]. Experience from China and South Korea shows that social sciences and humanities are positioned with important status in the political system and receive adequate investment (Hoang Giang, 2024) ^[9]. Second is limited publication quality and foreign language capacity, the proportion of lecturers achieving IELTS 6.5 standard is not yet high, affecting international collaboration ability. Third are challenges from open science and digital transformation, Mr. Nguyen Tai Dong, Director of the Institute of Philosophy under the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, warns of the risk of cognitive colonization through using foreign AI systems not trained on Vietnamese data and value systems, potentially distorting foundational concepts of Eastern philosophy (Viet Duc, 2024). Additionally, NAFOSTED representatives also note that the social sciences and humanities field is very confused about journal lists to use, as many Vietnamese issues are not published internationally (Viet Duc, 2024). Fourth is the challenge of shifting from reception to contribution, Mr. Dao Ngoc Bau, Director of the Institute of Politics and International Relations under the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, observes that Vietnam's social sciences and humanities currently mainly operate in the role of knowledge receivers, capacity for independent theoretical creation and doctrinal contribution remains limited, leading to risk of knowledge dependence (Viet Duc, 2024).

Discussion

Applying the Triple Helix theoretical framework of Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) ^[4] to explain the gap between Vietnam and ASEAN countries in social sciences and humanities position reveals differences in interaction among three actors including state, university and enterprise. The case of Malaysia has succeeded in creating close interaction between the state with MyBrain 15 policy and clear publication requirements, universities with investment in facilities and excellent research centers, and enterprises with reception of doctoral graduates. The result is Malaysia's social sciences and humanities publication rate reaching 36.8%, highest in the region, reflecting an efficiently operating ecosystem. The case of Thailand has strengths in international collaboration reaching 45% to 50% thanks to the inside-out internationalization strategy according to de Wit *et al.* (2023), with training and research linkage programs with major universities worldwide. In the case of Vietnam, the social sciences and humanities research ecosystem is in the early stage of development, linkages among the three actors remain loose reflected in low international collaboration rate of 30% to 35%, inadequate

investment resources, and limited connection between research and practical needs.

Comparing with the orientation of Resolution 59-NQ/TW, the Resolution identifies three shifts: from reception to contribution, from extensive to full, from lagging to rising. Regarding reception, Vietnam has done well demonstrated through cooperative relations with over forty international organizations (Nguyen Thanh Ha, 2025) ^[6] and absorption of advanced research methods. Regarding contribution remains limited, Mr. Dao Ngoc Bau observes the need for a historic shift from passive to active role, from knowledge localization towards contributing Vietnamese doctrine, a scientific theoretical system of international reference value based on national practice (Viet Duc, 2024). Regarding rising, some institutions have asserted their position such as Duy Tan University rank 482, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi setting target of global top 450 by 2035. However, to truly rise and pioneer, synchronized strategy and long-term investment are needed.

Experience from China and South Korea shows that social sciences and humanities are positioned with important status in the political system and receive adequate investment in financial resources, facilities and human resources (Hoang Giang, 2024) ^[9]. Consequently, social sciences and humanities have conditions for exceptional development, better serving national construction and development. From this experience, three lessons can be drawn for Vietnam. First is focused and stable investment, needing separate policies for social sciences and humanities, not applying common policies with natural sciences and technology. Second is developing high-quality human resources following the model of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi with targets of 100% doctoral lecturers and 45% professors and associate professors by 2045 (Hoang Tra, 2025) ^[10]. Third is building national research brand towards the goal of contributing Vietnamese doctrine, a scientific theoretical system of international reference value.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study has analyzed the position of Vietnam's social sciences and humanities based on updated 2026 data with three main findings. Regarding university rankings, Vietnam has ten universities in QS WUR 2026 ^[19], ranking fourth in ASEAN by quantity, but the quality gap with the leading group including Singapore and Malaysia remains very large, reflected in low academic reputation and citation indicators. Regarding international publications, Vietnam's social sciences and humanities publication rate of 13.7% is lower than Malaysia's 36.8%, Thailand's 29.5% and Indonesia's 16.4%, the international collaboration rate of 30% to 35% is also significantly lower than regional countries, with main causes from investment structure, foreign language capacity and domestic journal system. Regarding training policies, Hanoi's draft policy supporting one thousand doctoral trainees with scholarship level of 15 million VND per month and requirement of one Q1 or Q2 article is an important step forward, but the support level remains low and output requirements are not yet high compared to countries where Thailand requires two Scopus articles and Malaysia requires two Scopus or Web of Science articles. In the context of implementing Resolution 59-NQ/TW (2025) ^[3], Vietnam's social sciences and

humanities need to strongly transform from the position of reception to contribution, from lagging to rising.

For state management agencies, Resolution 59-NQ/TW needs to be institutionalized into a separate social sciences and humanities development strategy in the spirit of Resolution 107/NQ-CP of 2024 ^[5] on developing the Academy into a research center at regional level by 2030, with vision to 2045. Scholarship levels for doctoral candidates need to be increased to a minimum of 800 to one thousand USD per month, equal to Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, to create attractiveness and ensure doctoral candidates can focus full-time on research. Policies need to be developed for domestic social sciences and humanities journal system internationalization, supporting journals to approach Scopus and Web of Science standards, addressing the confusion about journal lists identified by NAFOSTED (Viet Duc, 2024). An International Cooperation Fund for social sciences and humanities should be established, prioritizing projects with international co-authors and aiming for Q1 publications, contributing to raising international collaboration rates to 40% to 45% by 2030.

For postgraduate training institutions, doctoral output standards for social sciences and humanities need to be raised to two Scopus articles instead of the current one article, approaching Thailand and Malaysia, while maintaining IELTS 6.5 requirements. Faculty development should follow the model of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi with 100% doctoral lecturers and 45% professors and associate professors by 2045 (Hoang Tra, 2025) ^[10], enhancing foreign language capacity and international article writing skills. Large, interdisciplinary research programs should be developed, linked to Vietnamese practice, aiming for the goal of contributing Vietnamese doctrine (Viet Duc, 2024), leveraging cooperative relations with over forty international organizations of the Academy (Nguyen Thanh Ha, 2025) ^[6] to build global research networks.

For doctoral candidates and young scientists, active participation in international research networks should be pursued, taking advantage of cooperation programs and scholarships from Academy partners and universities. Foreign language capacity needs to be enhanced, achieving IELTS 6.5 or higher, along with international scientific article writing skills through specialized training courses. Research topics should be selected linked to major national issues, with potential for policy impact and contribution to the global knowledge repository, realizing the spirit that social sciences and humanities are the foundation of thinking, the basis for policy formulation and national development strategy (Pham Tiep *et al.*, 2026).

This study has several limitations including international publication data only up to 2025 ^[6], not fully reflecting the impact of new policies issued in 2025 and 2026, lack of in-depth interviews with scientists and managers to understand qualitative causes, analysis not delving into specific disciplines within social sciences and humanities such as history, linguistics or sociology, and Hanoi's policy data being only in draft form, needing updating after official issuance. Future research directions could focus on in-depth analysis of Vietnam's international publication quality by specific social sciences and humanities disciplines, assessing the impact of Resolution 59-NQ/TW and related policies after three to five years of implementation,

comparing doctoral training standards for social sciences and humanities between Vietnam and advanced countries in the region, and studying the Vietnamese doctrine model and the potential contribution of Vietnam's social sciences and humanities to global knowledge.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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