

**LAW ENFORCEMENT ON EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF STATE MANAGEMENT MECHANISMS FOR
DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS**

**APLICAÇÃO DA LEI SOBRE EQUIDADE EDUCACIONAL NO ENSINO SUPERIOR:
UMA ANÁLISE DO PAPEL DOS MECANISMOS DE GESTÃO ESTATAL PARA
ESTUDANTES EM SITUAÇÃO DE DESVANTAGEM**

**APLICACIÓN DE LA LEY SOBRE EQUIDAD EDUCATIVA EN LA EDUCACIÓN
SUPERIOR: UN ANÁLISIS DEL PAPEL DE LOS MECANISMOS DE GESTIÓN
ESTATAL PARA ESTUDIANTES EN SITUACIÓN DE DESVENTAJA**



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ABSTRACT: The aim of this study is to clarify the role of state management mechanisms in ensuring access to and maintenance of education for disadvantaged students. Based on an interdisciplinary approach between law and education management, the study aims to assess the compatibility between the current legal framework and the practices of policies supporting students, while identifying bottlenecks in the implementation process. The study combines a survey of 189 people and semi-structured interviews with 15 people. The results show that, although legal regulations on educational equality have been relatively fully established, implementation is still affected by limitations in management coordination, monitoring mechanisms, and an approach that leans towards administrative support. This study contributes to clarifying the gap between legal design and higher education management practices, thereby proposing policy implications to enhance the coordination, accountability, and effectiveness of state management in promoting educational equality for disadvantaged students.

KEYWORDS: Law on equity. Higher education. State management mechanisms. Disadvantaged students.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste estudo é esclarecer o papel dos mecanismos de gestão estatal na garantia do acesso e da permanência na educação para estudantes em situação de desvantagem. Com base em uma abordagem interdisciplinar entre o direito e a gestão educacional, o estudo busca avaliar a compatibilidade entre o arcabouço jurídico vigente e as práticas de políticas de apoio aos estudantes, bem como identificar gargalos no processo de implementação. O estudo combina um levantamento com 189 participantes e entrevistas semiestruturadas com 15 pessoas. Os resultados mostram que, embora as regulamentações legais sobre igualdade educacional estejam relativamente bem estabelecidas, a implementação ainda é afetada por limitações na coordenação da gestão, nos mecanismos de monitoramento e por uma abordagem que tende ao suporte administrativo. Este estudo contribui para esclarecer a lacuna entre o desenho legal e as práticas de gestão do ensino superior, propondo implicações de políticas para aprimorar a coordenação, a responsabilização e a eficácia da gestão estatal na promoção da igualdade educacional para estudantes em situação de desvantagem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Lei de equidade. Ensino superior. Mecanismos de gestão estatal. Estudantes em situação de desvantagem.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este estudio es aclarar el papel de los mecanismos de gestión estatal en la garantía del acceso y la permanencia en la educación para estudiantes en situación de desventaja. Basado en un enfoque interdisciplinario entre el derecho y la gestión educativa, el estudio busca evaluar la compatibilidad entre el marco jurídico vigente y las prácticas de políticas de apoyo a los estudiantes, así como identificar cuellos de botella en el proceso de implementación. El estudio combina una encuesta a 189 personas y entrevistas semiestructuradas con 15 personas. Los resultados muestran que, aunque las regulaciones legales sobre igualdad educativa están relativamente bien establecidas, la implementación aún se ve afectada por limitaciones en la coordinación de la gestión, en los mecanismos de monitoreo y por un enfoque que tiende al apoyo administrativo. Este estudio contribuye a aclarar la brecha entre el diseño legal y las prácticas de gestión de la educación superior, proponiendo implicaciones de política para mejorar la coordinación, la rendición de cuentas

y la eficacia de la gestión estatal en la promoción de la igualdad educativa para estudiantes en situación de desventaja.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Ley de equidad. Educación superior. Mecanismos de gestión estatal. Estudiantes en situación de desventaja.*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization and the shift towards a knowledge-based development model, higher education is increasingly seen not only as a service for training high-level human resources but also as a key institution ensuring social equity and development opportunities for different population groups. Educational equity, particularly in higher education, has therefore become a legal principle and a strategically significant policy objective for many countries, especially developing ones. In Vietnam, this requirement arises in the context of both expanding the scale of higher education and addressing structural inequalities related to the economic conditions, regions, ethnicity, gender, and cultural capital of learners.

The Education Development Strategy to 2030, with a vision to 2045, clearly affirms the view of developing education towards equity, inclusiveness, and sustainability, emphasizing the State's responsibility in ensuring access to and enjoyment of education for disadvantaged groups (Government, 2024). From a legal perspective, the 2025 Higher Education Law further concretizes this principle by stipulating the responsibilities of the State, higher education institutions, and relevant entities in developing, organizing, and supervising policies to support learners, especially students from disadvantaged backgrounds (National Assembly, 2025). These orientations and regulations show that educational equity is no longer simply understood as expanding entry opportunities, but is approached as a process of ensuring the genuine right to education, including the ability to maintain and complete the program and fully participate in academic life.

However, the practice of higher education in Vietnam shows that significant gaps still exist between legal objectives and implementation results. Many studies have indicated that, although the system of policies supporting students is increasingly diverse, the effectiveness of access and the actual impact of these policies on disadvantaged students remain limited. Nguyen Thi Lien (2024) noted that inequality in higher education stems not only from differences in economic conditions but also from differences in access to information, ability to adapt to the academic environment, and the level of institutional support students receive. This raises issues not only in policy design, but also in the way those policies are implemented and managed in practice.

From a legal and public administration perspective, the enforcement of laws on equity in higher education is a complex process involving multiple levels of management and various stakeholders. The state not only plays a role in enacting legal regulations but also has the responsibility to coordinate, supervise, and ensure consistency in policy implementation among

management agencies and higher education institutions. In the context of increasing decentralization and autonomy in universities, the role of the state management mechanism becomes even more crucial, as it serves as a bridge between macro-level legal objectives and the practical organization of student support at the grassroots level.

In reality, many limitations in ensuring equity in higher education do not stem from a lack of legal regulations, but from inadequacies in the management and implementation mechanisms. Policies supporting disadvantaged students are sometimes implemented in a bureaucratic, fragmented manner, lacking effective coordination among relevant stakeholders. The mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of laws on educational equity are not yet truly linked to students' academic outcomes and school experiences. Furthermore, the accountability of management agencies and higher education institutions in ensuring the educational rights of disadvantaged students, has not been fully clarified in the practical application of the law.

In this context, studying the implementation of laws on educational equity in higher education from the perspective of state management mechanisms is significant both theoretically and practically. Academically, this research contributes to supplementing an interdisciplinary approach between law and education management, going beyond purely descriptive policy approaches or sociological analysis. Practically, clarifying the role, limitations, and bottlenecks of state management mechanisms will help identify the root causes of inadequacies in ensuring educational equity in higher education, thereby providing a basis for improving policies and laws.

Stemming from the aforementioned issues, the objective of this study is to analyze the extent and methods of law enforcement regarding educational equity in higher education, focusing on the role of state management mechanisms in supporting and ensuring the educational rights of disadvantaged students. The study aims to assess the compatibility between the current legal framework and management practices, and to clarify the governance factors affecting the effectiveness of educational equity policy implementation in higher education institutions.

To achieve this objective, the study focuses on answering the following questions: First, how does current law regulate educational equity and the responsibilities of state management in higher education? Second, how have state management mechanisms been implemented in practice to ensure the educational rights of disadvantaged students, and how effective are these mechanisms? Third, do the main limitations in enforcing educational equity laws stem from the

legal design or from the capacity and methods of management? Finally, what policy and management adjustments are needed to improve the effectiveness of enforcing educational equity laws in higher education in the current context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational equity in general, and equity in higher education in particular, has attracted considerable attention from domestic and international researchers, with diverse approaches ranging from legal and public policy perspectives to educational sociology and social psychology. These studies have contributed to clarifying the multifaceted nature of educational inequality and provided important arguments for policy planning and improvement.

In Vietnam, research focused relatively early on establishing a legal framework and policy direction to ensure educational equity. At the higher education level, Nguyen Thi Lien (2024), in her article “Social equity in higher education in Vietnam today”, clarified the manifestations of inequality in access, learning conditions, and the ability to benefit from educational resources among different groups of students. This study shows that higher education equity cannot be measured solely by enrollment rates, but requires consideration of the entire learning process and experiences of students. Following the same approach, Dao Thi Thu Hien (2023), in her article “Inequality in Public Higher Education in Vietnam”, pointed out the significant disparity between students from different regions and social groups in their access to learning resources, thereby reflecting the limitations of current support policies.

Several other studies delve into specific policies that directly impact educational equity. Nguyen Thi Mai Hoa (2025), in “Tuition Fee Policy and the Issue of Equity in Education”, analyzes tuition fees as a policy tool that both regulates resources and potentially increases inequality if effective support mechanisms are lacking. Trinh Thu (2025), in her article “Implementing Equity in Access to Education, Prioritizing Particularly Disadvantaged Regions”, focuses on regional priority policies, thereby clarifying the role of the State in adjusting spatial inequality. From the perspective of access rights, Nguyen Khanh Trung (2023) in “Equality of Opportunity in Education” emphasizes the need to distinguish between formal equity and substantive equity, considering this an important theoretical basis for evaluating the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Besides domestic studies, many international works have provided important theoretical foundations and empirical evidence on inequality in higher education. Studies in sociology and social psychology have clarified the mechanisms of inequality reproduction through academic context and institutional norms. Stephens et al. (2012), in “Unseen disadvantage: How American universities’ focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students”, point out the incompatibility between academic culture and the social context of first-year students. Goudeau et al. (2025), with “What causes social class disparities in education?”, further affirms the role of “mismatch” between the educational environment and the process of class socialization in maintaining inequality.

Systematic review studies also contribute significantly to identifying influencing factors and policy solutions. Fitzgerald et al. (2025), in “Exploring the factors informing educational inequality in higher education”, synthesized economic, cultural, and institutional factors affecting higher education inequality. Herbaut and Koen (2019), in “What Works to Reduce Inequalities in Higher Education?”, showed that financial aid and early access measures have a positive impact, but their effectiveness largely depends on implementation and monitoring. Studies on dropout rates, such as Helland et al. (2024), Hong (2022), Duchiep et al. (2022) and Herbaut (2021), also indicate that inequality is not only reflected in entry requirements but also in the ability to maintain and complete the program.

In addition, some studies approach educational inequality from a broader perspective of social reproduction and power structures. Lamont (2000), in “The dignity of working men: Morality and the boundaries of race, class, and immigration”, provides an analytical framework on class boundaries and moral values, which is significant in explaining the experiences of students from working-class backgrounds. Morales (2024), in “Social reproduction and education: a review of Chilean education and its social segregation since 1820”, shows the long-standing role of educational institutions in maintaining social stratification. Other studies, such as Van (2023), Odaga (2022) and Zwier et al. (2021) also clarify the relationship between preferential policies, assessment, and educational inequality.

Despite achieving significant results, existing studies reveal several notable limitations: Firstly, the majority of domestic research focuses on describing policies or analyzing inequality from a sociological perspective, while the consideration of educational equity as a law enforcement issue remains relatively limited. Secondly, the role of state management mechanisms in coordinating, monitoring, and ensuring the effective enforcement of laws on higher education equity has not been systematically analyzed. Thirdly, while international

studies provide rich theoretical frameworks and evidence, they have not been fully integrated into the legal and management context of education in Vietnam.

From these gaps, this study aims to supplement an interdisciplinary approach between law and education management, focusing on analyzing the enforcement of laws on educational equity in higher education through the role of state management mechanisms. The next research direction should not only focus on policy evaluation, but also clarify the relationship between legal design, management capacity, and the practical experiences of disadvantaged students. This approach is expected to contribute to the refinement of the theoretical framework and provide a scientific basis for policy reforms aimed at promoting equity in higher education in a substantive and sustainable manner.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

First, the textual analysis method was used to clarify the legal basis and policies governing educational equity in higher education. Relevant legal documents, strategies, policies, and guidelines were collected, classified, and analyzed according to criteria such as regulatory objectives, scope of application, responsible parties, and enforcement mechanisms. This method allows for a clear identification of the legal content of educational equity, as well as the role and responsibility of the State in ensuring the right to education for disadvantaged students. The textual analysis did not stop at the regulatory content but also focused on institutional logic and the relationship between law and educational management mechanisms in practice.

Next, a quantitative survey method was used to collect empirical data on the level and effectiveness of law enforcement in higher education. The survey sample consisted of 189 people, including administrators, lecturers, and students at higher education institutions. The selection of these three target groups aims to reflect the multifaceted perceptions and experiences related to educational equity, from the perspective of policy planning and implementation to the perspective of benefit. A 5-point Likert scale was used as the primary tool to collect quantitative data to measure respondents' perceptions, evaluations, and level of agreement regarding the implementation of laws on educational equity in higher education. The choice of a 5-point scale is suitable for the characteristics of educational policy and management research, allowing for a relatively complete reflection of the intensity of respondents' attitudes while ensuring simplicity, clarity, and statistical processing capabilities.

Specifically, each statement in the questionnaire was designed with an affirmative structure, and survey participants were asked to choose one of five corresponding response levels: 1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Undecided/Neutral, 4 – Agree and 5 – Strongly agree. This classification method clearly distinguishes between negative and positive evaluation levels, while allowing respondents to express intermediate attitudes in cases where they lack sufficient information or experience to make a definitive judgment.

In addition, a semi-structured interview method was used to supplement and deepen the quantitative results. The study interviewed 15 individuals, including education administrators and policy experts, coded from TL01 to TL15. The semi-structured interview format ensures alignment with the research questions while providing space for interviewees to share their experiences, perspectives, and personal assessments of the management and enforcement mechanisms. The qualitative data obtained was analyzed thematically, focusing on clarifying institutional, governance, and practical implementation factors of equity policies in higher education.

Combining the three methods mentioned above helps the research achieve a triangular approach, thereby enhancing the reliability and scientific value of the research results. Text analysis provides the legal basis, quantitative surveys reflect trends and the prevalence of issues, while semi-structured interviews help explain the causes and context of the findings. This approach is consistent with the research objective of law enforcement in education management, while ensuring the logic, consistency, and generalizability of the conclusions drawn.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The completeness of the legal framework on higher education equity

This group of results reflects the perceptions of the survey participants regarding the completeness, clarity, and applicability of the current legal framework related to higher education equity. Recent domestic studies show that the legal system has relatively fully established principles and guidelines on educational equity, but a gap still exists between regulations and practical implementation. The 2025 Higher Education Law continues to emphasize the responsibility of the State and educational institutions in ensuring the right to education for disadvantaged students (National Assembly, 2025). Based on this, indicators are

designed to measure the level of recognition of the principle of equity, the clarity of management responsibilities, and the consistency of the legal framework, thereby assessing the legal foundation for implementing educational equity in higher education.

Table 1.

Assessment of the legal framework on higher education equity

Order	Survey Results	1	2	3	4	5	XTB	Interpretation
1	Laws clearly affirm the principle of fairness in higher education	5	11	27	89	57	3.96	The results show that the principle of equity in higher education has been clearly established by law, providing a foundation and direction for policy management and implementation.
2	State responsibility towards disadvantaged students is clearly defined	7	15	34	81	52	3.82	The State's responsibility towards disadvantaged students is relatively clearly recognized, affirming the leading role of public administration in ensuring the right to education.
3	Policies to support disadvantaged students are fully institutionalized	9	19	39	75	47	3.69	Support policies have been institutionalized to a fairly good extent, but still need improvement to increase consistency and enhance the effectiveness of practical implementation.
4	Legal regulations facilitate implementation at the grassroots level	13	27	51	65	33	3.41	Legal regulations can generally be implemented at the grassroots level, but are limited due to a lack of detailed guidance and organizational conditions for implementation.
5	The system of documents ensures consistency and minimizes overlap	17	32	58	56	26	3.24	The understanding of the consistency of the legal system remains cautious, reflecting the fragmentation.

Note. Elaborated by author (2025).

The average score, ranging from 3.24 to 3.96, indicates a fairly positive assessment of the legal framework. TL01 stated that “the law clearly states the principle of fairness but leans towards generalization” (comment: emphasizes limitations in operational efficiency). TL03 stated that “there are many documents but they lack coherence” (comment: reflects overlapping regulations). TL07 commented that “there is a lack of detailed guidance for the grassroots level” (comment: points out the gap between law and implementation). TL09 added that “the regulations are good but difficult to apply uniformly” (comment: raises the issue of inconsistent implementation).

Effectiveness of the state management mechanism in law enforcement organizations

This result focuses on evaluating the coordinating, guiding, supervising, and accountability role of the state management mechanism in the process of implementing laws on equity in higher education. Studies emphasize that state management plays a bridging role between legal objectives and practical implementation at educational institutions (Nguyen Thi Lien, 2024). However, in the context of decentralization and autonomy, management effectiveness largely depends on coordination capacity and monitoring mechanisms (Trinh Thu, 2025). Therefore, indicators are developed to measure the clarity of responsibility assignment, the effectiveness of inter-level coordination, and the level of accountability.

Table 2.

Effectiveness of state management mechanisms in law enforcement organization

Order	Survey Results	1	2	3	4	5	XTB	Interpretation
1	The regulatory body plays a coordinating role in policy development.	8	16	43	78	44	3.71	The results show that state management agencies play a central coordinating role, but the effectiveness of coordination depends on organizational capacity and inter-sectoral coordination.
2	Clear assignment of management responsibilities.	11	24	49	68	37	3.50	The assignment of management responsibilities is assessed as fairly clear, however, gaps in the boundaries of responsibility between management levels still exist.
3	Effective coordination between different levels of management.	13	29	54	61	32	3.36	The average score reflects a moderately good level of coordination between management levels, lacking true synchronization in policy implementation.
4	Timely guidance on law enforcement.	15	33	57	56	28	3.26	Legal implementation guidelines are generally issued, but their timeliness and specificity are limited, affecting the effectiveness of implementation at the grassroots level.
5	Effective enforcement monitoring mechanisms.	18	37	62	49	23	3.13	The monitoring mechanism is assessed as ineffective, showing a lack of tools for tracking and evaluating results based on educational equity.
6	Accountability is ensured.	20	39	65	43	22	3.05	Accountability in higher education management is limited, reflecting a lack of individual responsibility linked to policy implementation results.

Note. Elaborated by author (2025).

The declining average scores in the monitoring and accountability indicators show a weak point. TL02 states that “management is still too procedural” (comment: administrative governance). TL04 identifies “lack of independent oversight” (comment: institutional

bottleneck). TL15 emphasizes “lack of individual accountability linked to results” (comment: limited accountability). TL10 adds “lack of synchronized coordination between levels” (comment: weak inter-level coordination).

Accessibility and benefit of policies for disadvantaged students

This group of results reflects educational equity at a substantive level, through the ability of disadvantaged students to access, benefit from, and maintain support. Many studies indicate that inequality lies not only in access to admission but also in learning experiences and the risk of dropping out (Hien, 2023; Fitzgerald et al., 2025). Tuition and financial aid policies are important but insufficient without academic and psychological support (Hoa, 2025). Indicators are designed to measure the entire policy benefit chain, from information and procedures to the impact on reducing dropout rates.

Table 3.

Accessibility and benefit from policies for disadvantaged students

Order	Survey Results	1	2	3	4	5	XTB	Interpretation
1	Students have easy access to policy information.	16	33	61	55	24	3.20	Students have average access to policy information, indicating that while communication channels exist, they are not sufficiently comprehensive or user-friendly for disadvantaged groups.
2	Eligibility criteria for policies are clear.	14	30	59	60	26	3.28	Eligibility criteria for policy benefits are relatively clear, but differing interpretations persist among different units, impacting consistency in implementation.
3	The application process is simple.	18	36	64	48	23	3.11	The procedures are considered not truly simple, reflecting the administrative burden that still exists for disadvantaged students when accessing support.
4	Support levels meet learning needs.	20	41	66	43	19	3.00	The level of support only partially meets learning needs, indicating a gap between policy design and the actual needs of students.
5	Policies are continuous. Academic and psychological support is provided.	22	43	68	40	16	2.92	The continuity of the policy is not fully guaranteed, leading to interruptions in support and reducing the effectiveness of long-term academic maintenance.
6	Policies help reduce the risk of dropping out.	25	45	67	37	15	2.85	Academic and psychological support is limited, reflecting an approach to educational equity that primarily focuses on financial assistance.

7	Students have easy access to policy information.	23	42	65	41	18	2.96	The new support policy contributes to reducing the risk of dropping out to a certain extent, but it is not strong enough to create a sustainable impact.
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Note. Elaborated by author (2025).

Table 3 results show that indicators 5–7 all have average scores below 3.0, indicating clear and persistent limitations on the actual effectiveness of policies supporting disadvantaged students. These results suggest that existing interventions have not adequately addressed the multifaceted nature of educational inequality. As TL05 noted, “students may be aware that policies exist, but accessing them is difficult” (comment: lack of communication), highlighting weaknesses in information dissemination and guidance mechanisms. TL06 emphasizes that “support is primarily financial” (comment: lack of depth), reflecting a narrow policy design that overlooks non-economic barriers to learning. TL08 also found that “a lack of academic support reduces the effectiveness of support” (comment: incomplete equity), emphasizing the importance of integrated academic and psychosocial measures. Finally, TL11 added that “current policies are insufficient to prevent dropout” (comment: limited impact), highlighting the gap between short-term support and long-term educational retention outcomes.

The gap between legal objectives and management practices

This result summarizes the degree of “mismatch” between the spirit of the law and the management practices of higher education. The Education Development Strategy to 2030, Vision 2045, sets the goal of inclusive equity (Government, 2024), but many studies show incompatibility between institutional goals and the implementation context (Diep Anh, 2024; Goudeau et al., 2025). Indicators are developed to measure the level of equity priority, feedback mechanisms, and the ability to adjust policies to actual needs.

Table 4.

The gap between legal and practical goals

Order	Survey Results	1	2	3	4	5	XTB	Interpretation
1	Fairness is prioritized in management	12	26	52	64	35	3.44	Equity is recognized as a priority in higher education management, but the level of priority is uneven across different levels and management units.
2	Management reflects the true spirit of the law	17	34	60	52	26	3.19	General management activities reflect the spirit of the law, but there is still a certain gap between legal regulations and operational practice.
3	Management focuses on results over procedures	21	40	64	45	19	3.01	Management still tends towards compliance with administrative procedures, while a results-based approach to equity has not yet truly emerged.

4	Policies are adjusted flexibly	23	43	67	39	17	2.90	Flexibility in policy adjustments is limited, making it difficult to promptly meet the diverse needs of disadvantaged students.
5	There is a feedback mechanism for disadvantaged students	25	45	69	36	14	2.84	The mechanism for receiving feedback from disadvantaged students is unclear, reducing the ability to adjust policies based on real-world experience.
6	Feedback is used to improve policies	27	47	70	33	12	2.77	The use of feedback to improve policies is very limited, reflecting a one-sided approach in the management and decision-making process.
7	Fairness is integrated into management evaluations	24	46	71	35	13	2.82	Educational equity has not been fully integrated into the criteria for evaluating management effectiveness, leading to a lack of motivation for substantive improvement.
8	Management promotes genuine fairness	22	44	72	37	14	2.87	The results show that the new management promotes fairness at a conceptual level, but has not yet created a significant shift towards genuine fairness for students.

Note. Elaborated by author (2025).

The low average scores in the policy response and adjustment indicators reveal a significant gap. TL14 stated that “legal goals are high, but management has not kept pace” (comment: institutional mismatch). TL07 argued that “management is one-sided and lacks feedback” (limited participation). TL09 emphasized that “fairness is not yet a criterion for evaluating management” (comment: lack of integration). TL11 concluded that “substantive fairness has not been achieved” (core challenge).

The results show that the legal framework governing equity in higher education is relatively complete; however, the effectiveness of its implementation depends heavily on the state's management mechanisms. Although laws and policies clearly demonstrate a commitment to equity, a persistent gap exists between legal equity and substantive equity for disadvantaged students. As TL3 noted, “the legal system provides general principles, but lacks operational guidance at the institutional level” (comment: ambiguity in implementation). This limitation reinforces an administrative approach focused on compliance rather than outcomes. TL8 further emphasizes that “support policies are still primarily designed around financial support, without adequately addressing academic and psychological aspects” (narrow policy scope), highlighting the localized nature of current equity interventions.

From a governance perspective, TL9 notes that “equity objectives are not systematically integrated into governance performance evaluations” (weak accountability), which undermines incentives for meaningful performance. TL12 adds that “governance activities rarely incorporate feedback from disadvantaged students into policy revisions” (lack of feedback),

reinforcing a top-down, one-way governance model. Overall, these insights suggest that achieving genuine equity requires a shift from administrative governance to a governance model based on rights protection, results-based evaluation, and active accountability mechanisms incorporating stakeholder participation.

DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that while significant institutional progress has been made in enforcing laws on educational equity in higher education in Vietnam, considerable gaps remain between legal objectives and substantive equity for disadvantaged students. These findings not only reflect Vietnam's specific situation but also align with the general trend observed in international studies on higher education inequality, where policy design and management capacity play a decisive role in implementation effectiveness.

Firstly, the research confirms that the legal framework for higher education equity in Vietnam has been relatively comprehensive and consistent in principle. The 2025 Higher Education Law further strengthens this orientation by emphasizing the obligation to ensure the right to education for disadvantaged groups as a core content of state management in higher education (National Assembly, 2025).

However, the decreasing average scores in indicators on ease of implementation and consistency of the legal system reveal a structural problem: the law tends to focus on establishing goals and principles rather than providing specific implementation tools. This finding is consistent with the observation of Nguyen Thi Lien (2024), who argues that social equity in higher education in Vietnam is still primarily approached at the policy-oriented level, while the implementation mechanism at the grassroots level lacks detail and consistency. From the perspective of policy implementation theory, this is a manifestation of the gap between “laws on paper” and “laws in action”, a common phenomenon in public administration in transitional countries.

Secondly, the research results clarify the central but not uniformly effective role of the state management mechanism in organizing the implementation of laws on educational equity. Although indicators of coordination and responsibility allocation achieved a fairly good rating, indicators related to supervision and accountability had lower average scores. This shows that state management still operates mainly according to administrative logic, focusing on

procedural compliance rather than evaluating the actual results of equity achieved. This observation is consistent with the studies of Trinh Thu (2025), which point out that priority policies in education are often implemented through administrative resource allocation, lacking mechanisms for monitoring long-term impacts.

In the international context, many studies have emphasized that the effectiveness of policies to reduce educational inequality largely depends on management and monitoring capacity (Herbaut & Koen, 2019; Fitzgerald et al., 2025). The lack of independent monitoring mechanisms and clear accountability can diminish the impact of even well-designed policies. This research shows that Vietnam is also not outside this trend, especially when state management has not linked educational equity with criteria for evaluating governance effectiveness.

Thirdly, the results related to the accessibility and benefits of policies for disadvantaged students most clearly reflect the gap between legal equity and substantive equity. Low average scores on indicators of continuity of support, academic and psychological support, as well as the ability to reduce the risk of dropping out, suggest that current policies still favor short-term financial support. This finding is consistent with the analysis of Nguyen Thi Mai Hoa (2025), which argues that tuition and financial support policies only partially address the issue of equity, while academic, cultural, and psychological factors play equally important roles.

International studies have provided compelling evidence of the impact of academic context and the “mismatch” between the educational environment and social background of disadvantaged students. Stephens et al. (2012) and Goudeau et al. (2025) indicates that students from disadvantaged social groups often face difficulties not only financially but also in adapting to academic norms. In this context, the lack of academic and psychological support mechanisms can increase the risk of dropping out, even if students have access to higher education. Research results in Vietnam show a similar picture, as current support policies are insufficient to comprehensively address structural barriers.

Fourth, research results on the gap between legal objectives and management practices show that educational equity has not truly become a central criterion in evaluating the effectiveness of state management. Although strategies and laws emphasize the goal of inclusive equity (Government, 2024), indicators of feedback mechanisms and policy adjustments according to actual needs score low average. This shows that the law enforcement process remains one-sided, lacking genuine participation from disadvantaged students—those directly affected by the policy.

From the perspective of modern public administration theory, the absence of policy feedback and learning mechanisms is a serious limitation, as it reduces the ability of the management system to adjust and adapt. Studies by Easterbrook and Hadden (2021) emphasize that interventions aimed at reducing educational inequality are only effective when designed and tailored based on the specific context and experiences of learners. This research suggests that Vietnam needs to shift from a compliance-based management model to a rights and outcomes-based management model, in which educational equity is considered a central evaluation criterion.

Synthesizing the results, this study contributes to affirming that the biggest challenge in enforcing laws on equity in higher education lies not in the lack of legal regulations, but in the capacity and operational methods of the state management mechanism. Educational equity, therefore, needs to be understood not only as a policy objective but as a governance process requiring interdisciplinary coordination, effective oversight, and the participation of relevant stakeholders. This approach aligns with the orientation towards sustainable and inclusive education development and opens important implications for future reforms in higher education management.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS, POLICY IMPLICATIONS, AND RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This study systematically analyzed the enforcement of laws on educational equity in higher education, focusing on the role of the state management mechanism towards disadvantaged students. Based on a combination of legal text analysis, a survey of 189 administrators, lecturers, and students, and semi-structured interviews with 11 education administrators and policy experts, this study clarifies the relationship between legal design, management methods, and substantive educational equity in the context of current Vietnamese higher education.

The research findings indicate that the legal framework for equity in higher education in Vietnam has been relatively well-developed in terms of principles and orientation, especially after the promulgation of the Higher Education Law of 2025. Principles regarding the guarantee of the right to education, support for disadvantaged students, and the State's responsibilities have been clearly institutionalized. However, the effectiveness of law enforcement remains

limited due to the fact that the state management mechanism has not fully translated legal regulations into effective governance practices at the grassroots level.

The study also points out that the current state management mechanism still leans towards administrative management and procedural compliance, while key elements of modern public governance such as results-based oversight, accountability, and policy feedback mechanisms have not been fully utilized. This leads to a significant gap between the equity established in the law and the equity that disadvantaged students actually experience during their studies. In particular, current support policies still mainly focus on financial support, while academic, psychological, and inclusive support, factors that play a crucial role in reducing the risk of dropping out—have not received adequate attention.

From these findings, the study draws several important policy implications for improving and enhancing the effectiveness of law enforcement on educational equity in higher education.

Firstly, it is necessary to continue improving the law in a way that strengthens its feasibility and operability, especially through the issuance of detailed guidelines on the organization and implementation of educational equity in higher education institutions. The law should not only establish principles but also clarify the specific responsibilities of each management entity, linked to clear evaluation criteria and control mechanisms.

Secondly, the state management mechanism needs to be reformed towards a rights-based and results-based management approach, in which educational equity is identified as a central criterion in evaluating the effectiveness of higher education governance. This requires strengthening independent oversight mechanisms, increasing information transparency, and reinforcing the accountability of management agencies and higher education institutions in ensuring the right to education for disadvantaged students.

Thirdly, policies supporting disadvantaged students need to be designed in a comprehensive and continuous manner, going beyond isolated financial support. Integrating academic support, psychological counseling, academic advising, and support for school integration will contribute to improving the actual effectiveness of educational equity, especially in reducing dropout rates and enhancing the ability of disadvantaged students to complete their programs.

Fourth, it is necessary to establish and effectively operate policy feedback mechanisms from students, especially disadvantaged students, as an integral part of state management in higher education. Genuine student participation not only helps improve policy quality but also

contributes to shifting the management model from a one-way approach to inclusive and adaptive governance.

Besides the contributions mentioned above, this study also has some limitations that need to be considered objectively. Firstly, the survey data was collected using a cross-sectional method, thus failing to reflect changes in law enforcement and educational equity over time. Secondly, while the survey sample includes many groups, it does not fully encompass the diversity of higher education institutions and different regions. Thirdly, the quantitative data is primarily based on respondents' self-assessments, and therefore may be influenced by desired social biases.

Given these limitations, the study suggests further research directions such as conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of education equity policies, expanding the scope of the survey to specific regions and target groups, and incorporating objective indicators of student learning outcomes and retention. These research directions will contribute to a deeper understanding of law enforcement and state management in promoting equity in higher education.

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 - ☐ **Ethical approval:** This study complies with the ethical guidelines in Articles 8, 12, 19, 20, 43, 45, 47 and the general issues of the Law on Science, Technology and Innovation (Law No. 93/2025/QH15) of Vietnam on scientific integrity, professional ethics in scientific research, technological development; establishment and registration of scientific and technological organizations; information activities, statistics on science, technology and innovation, scientific journals. All subjects participate in the study voluntarily, without coercion or inducements; their rights, dignity, and autonomy are respected and protected.
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