Kim Anh Kieu
Hanoi University of Culture, Hanoi, Vietnam
E-mail: anhkk@huc.edu.vn
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-3811-7883

Van Thien Nguyen
Hanoi University of Culture, Hanoi, Vietnam
E-mail: thiennv@huc.edu.vn
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-2267-6592

The school librarian's position between law and practice in Vietnam and Poland: Evidence from Vietnamese primary school principals, 2021

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Kim Anh Kieu – PhD in Library and Information Science, lecturer at the Faculty of Library and Information Science, Hanoi University of Culture, Hanoi, Vietnam. He received his doctoral degree from the University of Warsaw in 2024, with a dissertation entitled *Improving Organization and Operation of Primary School Libraries in Vietnam's Red River Delta Region: Diagnosis and Recommendations*. His research focuses on school libraries, particularly their organisation, management and development within centralised education systems. He teaches information retrieval and is actively engaged in promoting effective library services and fostering reading culture in schools.

Van Thien Nguyen – PhD in Library and Information Science, Dean of the Faculty of Library and Information Science at Hanoi University of Culture, Hanoi, Vietnam. He received his doctoral degree in 2017 with a dissertation on modern library management in Vietnam. His academic and professional work spans information organisation, library automation, digital libraries and information policy. He has led and participated in numerous national research projects using his extensive experience in both practice and academia, including leadership roles in university libraries. His work demonstrates a strong commitment to advancing digital transformation and improving the effectiveness of library and information services in Vietnam.

Keywords: school library; school librarian; principal–librarian relationship; school library legislation; comparative library studies; Vietnam; Poland; directed content analysis

Abstract: This article presents ten accounts of Vietnamese primary school principals on school librarian conditions against the legislative framework that classifies the position. The corpus, 210 question–answer units from semi-structured interviews conducted in 2021 across seven provinces of the Red River Delta, is analysed through directed content analysis using five predetermined codes drawn from Vietnamese law. The study sits within the socio-legal gap-study tradition, treating principals' testimony as evidence of the gap between legal intent and operational impact. The analysis distinguishes prescriptions by how they are administered. Those administered above the school (salary scale, the grade IV professional title, external recruitment authority) are set by national instruments and lie outside the school's authority to alter. Two findings go beyond that: all ten principals describe the librarian holding concurrent duties, an arrangement the staffing circular in force at the time permitted but did not mandate, and the Charter of primary schools' inclusion of the librarian in the professional group is observed at two of the eight schools whose accounts address it, the other six grouping the librarian with office staff. Conditions set as standards but left to local enforcement (room area, collection adequacy) vary with local circumstance, as do matters no instrument reaches, such as partnership relationships. Poland, which places the teacher-librarian inside the teaching profession by statute, serves as a parallel-by-category comparator: its statutes show what the teacher category entails once granted. The principal–librarian literature presumes the principals to be the ones who control hiring and budget; the article extends it to centralised state-employee systems and shows that reform directed at downstream symptoms leaves the prescriptions administered above the school untouched.

Background to the study

Across primary schools in Vietnam's Red River Delta, principals describe the school librarian as occupying an important role and, in the same conversations, describe arrangements that make the role almost impossible to occupy. The librarian is grouped with accounting and clerical staff in the school's organisational chart; pay sits at the lowest tier of the public-employee salary scale; the post is routinely combined with equipment-management, treasury or office duties to make it salary-viable; the curriculum framework expects the librarian to design and run reading periods at the library. That is pedagogical work for which the support-staff placement confers no pedagogical standing. The pattern repeats across rural and urban schools, across seven provinces, in well-resourced and under-resourced libraries alike. In the main case, it does not present as a discretionary failure of school leadership, though one element of it (which group the librarian is placed in) remains within the school's power. It presents as the operational form of a categorical decision the legislation has already made.

That decision is the placement of the school librarian as support staff under the Law on Public Employees (Luật Viên chức 58/2010/QH12, as amended), categorically distinct from teachers and from the educator status protected by the Law on Education 43/2019/QH14 and crystallised in the 2025 Law on Teachers. The

placement carries downstream rules (a separate salary scale, a separate qualifications regime, a different career ladder, a professional-title ceiling, no equivalent of the teachers' preferential allowance) that do not require local enforcement. They follow from category. The principal is the proximate manager of conditions they did not design and cannot redraw; the librarian is the worker placed by statute in a category the curriculum then asks them to work beyond.

The professional identity of the school librarian in such a system is therefore not adequately read as a perception phenomenon. The principal–librarian literature treats the relationship as relational and prescribes principal-directed advocacy as the dominant remedy (Hartzell, 1997, 2002; Church, 2008, 2010; Lance & Kachel, 2018; Lee & Klinger, 2011; Oberg, 2006). That literature presupposes scope conditions, such as principals deciding hiring, budget and role definition, that do not hold in centralised state-employee systems where classification, salary and career path are set by statute and administered above the school. Where these elements are pre-determined, the dyad is embedded in a legislative structure that precedes and constrains it; the structure cannot be negotiated by the dyad. Treating the librarian's identity as principally a perception or advocacy problem in such a system reads downstream symptoms as upstream causes.

Vietnam is one such system. Poland is another, with the categorical decision made the other way: the teacher-librarian is placed within the teaching profession by the Teachers' Charter (Karta Nauczyciela) of 1982, with membership of the pedagogical council by right under the Education Law (Prawo oświatowe) of 2016, salary on the teacher grid and qualification requirements, including pedagogical preparation, set by regulation. The Polish system is not invoked here as a model one. Osiecka-Chojnacka (2015) documents its own structural problems. The 1999 abolition of the national staffing norm has left the operating authority (typically the commune), which approves each school's staffing plan, with no binding standard for librarian posts, and this produces a dependency on local goodwill that converges, by an opposite route, with the dependency Vietnamese centralisation produces. The Polish case earns its place because the categorical decision it makes the other way is legible on the face of its statutes: the same professional function, placed in the teacher category, draws pedagogical council membership, the teacher salary grid and the professional advancement ladder as direct entailments of that placement. Category, not authority, is what the comparison brings into view.

The question this article asks is how the accounts of Vietnamese primary school principals on school librarians evidence the operation of the legislative categories that classify the librarian's position. The question is deliberately bounded. It does not ask what principals believe that librarians should be; the principal–librarian literature has answered that question many times. It does not ask whether principals support school libraries; the interviews show that they consistently do, and the support does not change the structural picture. It asks what principals' on-the-ground administration of the position evidences about how the statutory placement operates day-to-day in primary schools.

The corpus is a re-analysis of ten semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author in 2021 with principals across seven provinces of the Red River Delta (Kieu, 2024). The original interviews engaged principals on the full range of school-library matters: staffing, qualifications, training, authority, funding, infrastructure, programming and evaluative views, across a 22-question schedule. The verbatim English translations form a structured corpus of 210 question–answer units. The analytical method is directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), with predetermined codes drawn from five structural categories of Vietnamese school library legislation. Reading principals' accounts against these legislative categories, rather than against a sentiment scale or an attitudinal continuum, is the operation that makes the legislation's downstream consequences visible.

The contribution is threefold. First, the article provides an empirical account of Vietnamese primary school librarian conditions read against the specific legislative instruments that produce them. Existing work on Vietnamese school libraries treats legal frameworks and on-the-ground conditions in separate registers; the present analysis reads them together. Second, the article extends the principal–librarian literature beyond the scope conditions in which it has principally developed. In a centralised state-employee system, the variables the existing literature identifies as principal-controlled (hiring, budget, role definition, evaluation) are partially or wholly held above the school, and what principals' accounts evidence shifts accordingly. Third, the article contributes to socio-legal scholarship in the gap-study tradition (Pound, 1910; Genn, 1999). It demonstrates a method that is replicable in other centralised education systems: principal interviews function as a low-cost structural diagnostic of the gap between legal intent and operational impact where the most affected actors, the librarians themselves, are statutorily peripheral and difficult to access. The Polish parallel, threaded through the analysis, makes the Vietnamese categorical placement legible as contingent rather than as a natural feature of school organisation.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

This study operates with two constructs: **structural classification** and **witnessed consequence**.

Structural classification refers to the legal-administrative distinction between support staff and teachers under Vietnam's Law on Public Employees (Luật Viên chức No. 58/2010/QH12, as amended by Law 52/2019/QH14) and the subordinate instruments that populate its categories. The term is deliberately narrow. It does not name informal role perceptions, job descriptions or cultural status; it names the statutory category into which the school librarian position is placed, and the rules on salary scale, career ladder and professional authority that stem from that placement. The distinction matters because, in Vietnamese law, public employee is the superordinate category covering both teachers and school librarians, while the support-staff/teacher split within it determines what protections the Law on Teachers (Luật Nhà giáo, 2025) attaches to the position. Classification here is therefore not

a descriptive label applied after the fact; it is the legal device through which the librarian's claim to pedagogical status is legislatively withheld.

Witnessed consequence bounds what the interview corpus is taken to evidence. Principals are the proximate administrators of classified workers they did not classify, in institutions whose material conditions they manage but did not design. Their accounts can evidence the downstream operation of classification on daily school life: who does what work, under what pay, with what access to professional bodies, towards what evaluations. They cannot evidence the classification itself, its statutory origins or the causal chain connecting individual legislative decisions to the present configuration. The construct therefore licenses a specific methodological claim that principals' talk is a legitimate window into the material friction produced by classification, while disclaiming the stronger claim that it explains why the classification exists.

Both constructs sit within a wider vocabulary that needs disentangling. Structural classification is upstream of three adjacent terms with which it should not be confused: *role*, which denotes situational expectations and can vary within a classification; *status*, which denotes social standing and is an outcome rather than a cause; and *professional identity*, the self-understanding of occupants. Classification determines the legal terms within which roles are negotiated, status accrued and identities formed.

That determining relation is the subject of the theoretical anchor adopted here, Bowker and Star's (1999) account of classification systems as **information infrastructure**. In *Sorting Things Out*, they argue that classification systems are not passive labels but active, materially consequential infrastructures that organise perception, allocate resources and shape what can be seen, said and done within an institutional field. Three of their arguments are load-bearing here. First, classification systems are **infrastructural**: taken for granted by those who operate within them, yet consequential in their operation. They valorise some points of view and silence others (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 5) while remaining largely invisible to those they govern. This is why principals can articulate expectations of the librarian position while simultaneously accepting the support-staff classification that makes those expectations difficult to meet. The classification is not an object of reflection but the ground on which reflection takes place.

Second, **torque** is "the twisting that occurs when a formal classification system is mismatched with an individual's biographical trajectory, memberships, or location" (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 223). It names the friction produced when categories fail to contain the lives sorted into them. Torque is what principals observe daily: librarians hired as support staff but asked to teach information literacy, paid on support-staff scales but expected to deliver reading culture programmes, grouped in practice with office and accounting staff while held responsible for curriculum-aligned library services. The concept converts what might otherwise appear as ad hoc implementation problems into a theoretical object: the systematic mismatch between classification and work.

Third, classification systems are not merely imposed upon people; they become the medium through which those people perceive their situation. This is the analytical basis for the study's central move: principals' talk about librarians is not straightforwardly a measure of principals' beliefs; it is also evidence of the classificatory grammar through which those beliefs are organised.

These commitments couple theory to method. If classification systems organise the perception of those who operate within them, then reading principals' accounts against the legislative classification scheme is the analytical operation that surfaces the infrastructure principals describe living within. The five predetermined codes used in this study, set out in Section 4, are derived directly from the structural categories of Vietnamese school library legislation reviewed in Section 3; they are not psychological or behavioural in origin but legislative-classificatory. The legislative categories are treated as the infrastructural classification whose downstream consequences the interview data evidence. The coupling is not self-validating. It would have been disconfirmed had the conditions the legislation fixes turned out to vary across the ten schools, or had the matters whose administration sits inside the school (the grouping of the post, the combination of duties, the internal library budget) been observed as consistently as those administered above it. The data pass the first test and fail the second, and Section 5.5 treats that failure as a finding rather than as noise.

What remains is to say how the study stands to the existing account of the problem. Hartzell's "invisible school librarian" thesis (1997, 2002), which continues to frame the field (Centerwall, 2024), is positioned as the proposition the study extends rather than as its theoretical anchor. Where Hartzell describes invisibility as a relational outcome between principals and librarians, this study reads invisibility in centralised state-employee systems as statutorily produced: a structural rather than a perceptual phenomenon. The theoretical contribution is therefore a scope-conditions extension. The principal–librarian dyad sits inside a legislative infrastructure it cannot renegotiate, and that infrastructure does the work the literature has previously attributed to perception, advocacy or training.

Empirical review

Three bodies of work bear on the present study: scholarship on the principal–librarian relationship, scholarship on the Vietnamese school library system and scholarship on the Polish school library system. The first body is reviewed below by finding; the legislative materials of the second and third are presented parallel-by-category.

Prior empirical work on the principal–librarian relationship. Empirical scholarship on the principal–librarian relationship coalesces around four findings. First, the survey evidence is more favourable than the advocacy literature assumes: principals endorse the librarian's instructional role and report satisfaction with the librarians they have (Church, 2008, 2010; Shannon, 2009), while Hartzell (1997, 2002)

argues that the position nonetheless remains institutionally invisible. Second, where principals do recognise the instructional role, school library programmes show measurable gains in pupil literacy and curriculum engagement (Lance & Kachel, 2018); matched-comparison evidence finds higher reading and mathematics attainment in schools with a full-time certified librarian, though the reported effect sizes are small (Wine et al., 2023). Third, principal preparation programmes provide little or no systematic exposure to school library work, leaving recognition contingent on individual experience or chance encounter (Oberg, 2006; Lee & Klinger, 2011; Church et al., 2024). Church's Virginia studies show the corollary: where principals do endorse the instructional role, they report having learned it from the librarians they happened to work with, as principals or earlier as classroom teachers (Church, 2008, 2010). Fourth, the relational dyad operates within frames that emphasise advocacy, collaboration and visibility: the librarian advocating for institutional value, the principal being persuaded to allocate resources or recognition (Ash-Argyle & Shoham, 2012; Merga, 2020; Centerwall, 2024). This last finding is particularly consequential: it casts the librarian's position as something achievable through better communication or stronger advocacy rather than as something settled at a level above the dyad.

The literature's scope conditions matter. The studies above are conducted in education systems where principals hold authority over hiring, role assignment, budget allocation and performance evaluation of school librarians. In those systems, the recommendations follow from the findings: if recognition is the constraint, advocacy is the remedy; if preparation is the gap, principal training is the response. In centralised state-employee systems, where these elements are statutorily set above the school, the recommendations transfer poorly. The present study operates in such a system and reads what the principal–librarian relationship looks like when its scope conditions diverge from those of the existing literature.

The Vietnamese school library legislative framework. The Vietnamese school library is regulated through five structural categories that the present study uses as predetermined codes. Classification and statutory identity (C1) operate as follows: the Law on Public Employees 58/2010/QH12 places school librarians within the public employee category, distinct from officials and civil servants; within the public employee category, the school librarian sits as support staff, categorically separate from teachers. The professional title grade IV school librarian (Joint Circular 02/2015, replaced 15 August 2022 by Circular 02/2022/TT-BVHTTDL) is the lowest tier of professional library titles. The Charter of primary schools (Circular 28/2020/TT-BGDĐT) assigns the person doing library work to the tổ chuyên môn, the professional group, alongside teachers; it creates no pedagogical council. The staffing instrument in force at the time of fieldwork constituted the post accordingly. Circular 16/2017/TT-BGDĐT listed the primary-school library position as thư viện, thiết bị (library and equipment), one of eight support positions (Article 3(3)(a)), and established it jointly with information technology at a maximum of two people in delta and city schools of 28 classes or more and one in those of

27 or fewer, the thresholds falling to 19 and 18 classes in mountainous and island areas (Article 6(4)); Article 2(5) provided that one person may hold several such positions concurrently. Lower-secondary schools received a standalone library position with equipment listed separately (Article 4(3)), so the merged post is specific to the primary level. Circular 20/2023/TT-BGDĐT, in force from 16 December 2023, replaced Circular 16/2017 in full apart from its Article 9 and reconstituted the post as thư viện, quản trị công sở (library and office administration). The categorical separation therefore runs through the professional-title and salary instruments rather than through membership of the school's collective bodies.

Qualification, progression and remuneration (C2) cascade from the C1 placement. The salary scale for grade IV school librarian is set by Decree 204/2004/NĐ-CP at coefficients 1.86–4.06 in scale group B, the entry-level public employee tier. By contrast, primary-school teachers sit in scale group A1 (coefficients 2.34–4.98) under Circular 02/2021/TT-BGDĐT Article 8, carried forward by Circular 31/2026/TT-BGDĐT Article 7, with the further consequence of access to the teachers' preferential allowance (35% for primary teachers in lowland, city and town areas under Decision 244/2005/QĐ-TTg, since repealed, and Joint Circular 01/2006/TTLT-BGD&ĐT-BNV-BTC, rising to 50% in mountainous, island and remote areas) which the school librarian position did not receive. Circular 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT Article 14 specifies that the librarian must hold a vocational secondary or higher qualification in library science or an equivalent field, or another qualification with a supplementary library-skills certificate. Resolution 248/2025/QH15, passed after the fieldwork conducted for this study, sets an occupational allowance for school support staff at a minimum of 30% against a minimum of 70% for teachers, phased in on a roadmap the Government determines. The first step of that roadmap, Decree 182/2026/NĐ-CP, applies from 1 January 2026 and sets the rate at 20% for education support personnel (Article 3(1)) against 45% for teachers in primary schools (Article 3(6)(a)); it also repeals Decision 244/2005/QĐ-TTg. An occupational allowance thus reaches school library staff for the first time, and the differential with teachers narrows without closing.

Authority and decision-making (C3) is held outside the school. Authority over the librarian's establishment and staffing is held at provincial level under Decree 106/2020/NĐ-CP: the job position and public-employee structure are approved by the Provincial People's Committee under Articles 6(3) and 14, while the staffing quota itself is approved by the Provincial People's Council under Article 13, on the Committee's proposal and the Ministry of Home Affairs' appraisal. The school principal makes the proposal; the province approves it. Inside the school, the principal's authority is bounded: it covers book purchases, library spending and operational scheduling, but not post creation, classification or salary tier.

Professional governance fragmentation (C4) follows from the distribution of authority across three ministries with concurrent jurisdiction over the school librarian's professional identity: the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) on school library standards (Circular 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT, Circular 28/2020/TT-BGDĐT); the Ministry

of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MOCST) on professional library classification (Law on Libraries / Luật Thư viện 46/2019/QH14, Circular 02/2022, Circular 10/2023/TT-BVHTTDL) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) on the public employee employment regime and salary structure (Law on Public Employees 58/2010, Decree 204/2004, Decree 106/2020). The division is legible in the instruments themselves: MOET's own staffing circular, Circular 20/2023/TT-BGDĐT, refers the librarian's job-position description to MOCST's Circular 10/2023/TT-BVHTTDL. Funding for school library activity flows through Decision 329/QĐ-TTg's integration mechanism, under which implementation funds are integrated through other approved programmes rather than appropriated as a dedicated line.

Expectation versus operational enablement (C5) is established by the curriculum framework and its implementing instruments. The reading-culture policy frame is set by Decision 329/QĐ-TTg, whose object is the development of reading culture in the community, while the General Education Curriculum (Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông, GDPT 2018; Circular 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT) names the habit of reading among its general aims and, in subjects such as History, expects pupils to gather materials in the library. The school-library standard in force at the time of the fieldwork was Decision 01/2003/QĐ-BGDĐT as amended by Decision 01/2004/QĐ-BGDĐT; Circular 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT replaced both from 7 January 2023 and converts these, at its Level 2 attainment standard, into specific demands on the library and on the person who staffs it: two reading periods per class per semester, library-based subject lessons, 100% teacher and 80% pupil reading rates and a minimum 3% of recurrent expenditure for library activity. The curriculum framework expects librarians to guide students in selecting and reading materials, that is, to exercise pedagogical agency, but the support-staff placement holds that agency outside the categorical scope of the position. Existing Vietnamese empirical work on school libraries (Kieu, 2024) treats legal frameworks and on-the-ground conditions in separate registers; the present analysis reads them together.

The Polish school library legislative framework, parallel-by-category. Polish school librarians are teachers under the Teachers' Charter (Karta Nauczyciela) of 26 January 1982 (consolidated text Dz.U. 2026 poz. 515); Article 42(3)'s working-time table lists the teacher-librarian expressly among teaching posts, with membership of the pedagogical council by right under Prawo oświatowe of 14 December 2016 Article 69. The cascade from the C1 placement entails the professional advancement ladder (awans zawodowy, Karta Nauczyciela Chapter 3a), the teacher salary grid published annually by the Ministry of Education, qualification requirements including pedagogical preparation (Regulation of 14 September 2023, Dz.U. 2023 poz. 2102) and a 30-hour weekly teaching load establishing the role as a full-time teaching position at a known load. The 30-hour pensum is not a lighter obligation than the classroom teacher's: the same table sets 18 hours for primary-school teachers (Karta Nauczyciela Article 42(3)). The teacher-librarian's advantage lies in the load being defined, not in its being small. Authority is held locally: the school director drafts the organisational plan (arkusz organizacyjny),

and the operating authority (typically the commune) approves it, thereby deciding the librarian post's actual extent of employment rather than providing financial oversight alone (Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2015; Prawo oświatowe Article 110). The Act on Libraries of 27 June 1997 covers school libraries, requires every public school to maintain one, and leaves their organisation to separate regulations (Article 22); professional regulation of the school librarian is therefore largely unified within the education system, with no equivalent of Vietnam's three-ministry division. Funding for reading culture flows through the National Reading Development Programme 2.0 (Narodowy Program Rozwoju Czytelnictwa 2.0), Priority 3 (Resolution 69/2021, Regulation of 10 September 2021). Priority 3 carries a budget of approximately 172.8 million PLN for 2021–2025, of which 138.4 million comes from the state budget and the remainder from beneficiaries' own contributions, with at least 50% of any award required to be spent on books for the specific recipient school.

The Polish parallel does not, however, produce uniformly enabling outcomes. Osiecka-Chojnacka (2015) documents that after the 1999 abolition of the national staffing norm, the operating authority approving each school's staffing plan defaults to individual judgement, producing informal ratios that vary by locality from roughly one librarian post per 300 students to one per 600. The gap is in the Teachers' Charter itself: it fixes the teacher-librarian's full-time week at 30 hours but, as Osiecka-Chojnacka notes, "does not specify how many librarian posts (or fractions of them) a given school should have, or on what that should depend". Each operating authority then makes the decision in its own way. This default produces a dependency on local goodwill that converges, by an opposite route, with the dependency Vietnamese centralisation produces. The convergence is informative in a specific and limited way: a dependency on local goodwill arises under both centralised and locally held authority, so the locus of authority does not by itself account for it.

Gap statement. The principal–librarian literature is built on scope conditions that do not transfer to centralised state-employee systems; existing Vietnamese empirical work on school libraries does not read principal accounts against the specific legislative instruments that produce on-the-ground conditions; existing Polish empirical work documents structural problems in a system that has made the opposite categorical decision but does not formally compare with systems that have made the Vietnamese decision. The present study addresses these three gaps in combination by reading principals' on-the-ground accounts against the specific legislative instruments and by threading the Polish parallel as a structural contrast in which the entailments of categorical placement are legible on the face of the statutes.

Methodology

Research design. The study sits within socio-legal research, the empirical tradition that examines law as it operates in practice rather than as legislation specifies (Genn, 1999; Halliday & Schmidt, 2009). The conceptual framing follows Pound's

(1910) distinction between “law in books” and “law in action”: legislative provisions establish formal prescriptions whose operational consequences are accessible only through empirical inquiry. Within this tradition, the present study is structured as a gap study, an established socio-legal genre that documents the divergence between legal intent and on-the-ground impact. The analytical method is directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Directed content analysis differs from inductive content analysis in starting from a structured coding scheme derived from prior theory or conceptual source material, applied systematically across the corpus, with space for emergent codes where the data do not fit the scheme. It is applied here to principal interviews conducted as part of an earlier doctoral study (Kieu, 2024) and re-analysed here against a coding scheme drawn from Vietnamese school library legislation. The re-analysis design is appropriate where the original corpus is rich, where the original analytical lens differed from the present one and where the present research question is bounded by what the original data can evidence (Long-Sutehall et al., 2011; Ruggiano & Perry, 2019).

Participants. Ten Vietnamese primary school principals participated in the original semi-structured interviews. Five were rural primary school principals (in Hà Nội, Hạ Bằng commune; Hưng Yên, Văn Giang district; Nam Định, Nghĩa Hưng district; Nam Định, Hải Hậu district and Vĩnh Phúc, Bình Xuyên district). Five were urban primary school principals (in Hải Phòng; Nam Định, Nam Tiến commune; Ninh Bình; Thái Bình and Vĩnh Phúc, Vĩnh Yên ward). The participants are referred to throughout the article as Prin-A through Prin-J.

Data. The original interviews were conducted 8–15 September 2021 in Vietnamese, by remote voice call (Facebook Messenger), necessitated by Vietnam’s nationwide school closures during the pandemic’s fourth wave (April 2021–April 2022). Transcripts were translated verbatim into English. Question 1 was a demographic introduction and was excluded from analysis; the remaining 21 questions across 10 principals yielded 210 question–answer units, arranged as a structured corpus suitable for systematic coding.

Analytical approach. The coding framework comprises five a priori parent codes (C1–C5) derived from the structural categories of Vietnamese school library legislation set out in Section 3: classification and statutory identity (C1, with sub-codes C1a–C1d); qualification, progression, and remuneration (C2, with sub-codes C2a–C2d); authority and decision-making (C3, with sub-codes C3a–C3e); professional governance fragmentation (C4, with sub-codes C4a–C4c) and curriculum expectation versus operational enablement (C5, with sub-codes C5a–C5e). Coding proceeded in two passes. Pass 1 applied the predetermined codes systematically across the data, with sub-codes assigned where the inclusion criteria specified in the coding scheme were met. Disconfirming evidence (passages applying a code with reversed valence, where the data show the absence of an expected pattern) was flagged DIS and recorded separately to preserve its analytical value. Where a passage carried evaluative or recommendation content, it was flagged RECS. Pass 2, conducted after Pass 1 completion, served two purposes. First, the second author

Van Thien Nguyen reviewed all coded passages from Pass 1, flagging any coding decisions he disagreed with against the predetermined scheme; disagreements were then resolved through discussion between the two coders until consensus was reached. Second, this verification pass also examined the data for emergent codes and refined the scheme where necessary. The two-coder verification design provides a dependability check on the application of the predetermined codes, though inter-coder agreement was not quantified. Prevalence is reported at participant level (X out of 10), following the convention set out by Guest et al. (2012) for small-N qualitative samples where saturation rather than statistical generalisation is the analytical aim. Patton (2015, pp. 557–560) cautions against reporting participant counts in qualitative analysis, on the ground that they invite significance to be read off frequency, recommends adjectival prevalence instead and places the burden of proof on any decision to quantify. The counts reported here are not offered as measures of significance but as a test of uniformity: the analytical question is whether a condition holds across the corpus or varies within it, and for that question the number is the finding. Because a count reports the participants for whom a passage meeting the code's inclusion criteria exists, counts do not necessarily sum to ten: an answer may address a topic without yielding a passage that meets the inclusion criteria.

Trustworthiness. Qualitative trustworthiness practices applied include: code definitions specified in advance with inclusion criteria and worked examples; coding decisions documented in a passage-level coded matrix; disconfirming evidence preserved through DIS flagging rather than discarded; coding memos recorded for ambiguous decisions; a post-hoc check of every coded passage against the code definitions, with passages whose extract did not satisfy a code's stated criteria recoded before prevalence was computed; and reflexivity vigilance against the over-coding tendency that directed analyses can produce when codes derived from one source (legislation) are applied to data produced for a different purpose (the original dissertation). Trustworthiness criteria followed are those set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and elaborated for thematic-analytic procedures by Nowell et al. (2017). The second-coder verification described above operationalises the dependability criterion.

Results and discussion

The directed content analysis of the ten principals' interviews produced 184 coded passages across all participants, applying the five parent codes (C1–C5). Prevalence is reported at participant level (X/10) following the rationale set out in Section 4; passages applying a code with reversed valence are flagged DIS and reported separately, preserving disconfirming evidence as analytically valuable. The discussion is organised in four subsections matching the legislative spine, followed by a closing synthesis. Each subsection briefly recalls the relevant Vietnamese provisions presented in Section 3 and presents the testimony of the ten principals

as evidence of how those provisions operate in primary schools; the first three subsections thread the Polish counterpart at the structural point of contrast. The cumulative reading is consolidated at Section 5.5.

Statutory placement and its operational consequences

The legislative point. The legislative framework summarised in Section 3 places the school librarian, under the Law on Public Employees 58/2010/QH12, in the support-staff category, categorically distinct from teachers; Joint Circular 02/2015 (replaced from 15 August 2022 by Circular 02/2022/TT-BVHTTDL) appoints the school librarian at grade IV, the lowest professional library tier. The Charter of primary schools (Circular 28/2020/TT-BGDĐT) assigns the person doing library work to the professional group alongside teachers. The first analytical question is how the placement looks in operation, and whether the charter's own allocation is observed.

Categorical separation in school organisation (C1b). Six of the ten principals describe the librarian as grouped with office, accounting or clerical staff, the tổ văn phòng (office group). Circular 28/2020 defines that group as the staff doing clerical, accounting, treasury, school-health and other work, an enumeration that does not name library work. Article 14 of the same circular assigns library work to the professional group. Prin-B, articulating the school workforce, separates the two groups: "the school has teachers and staff. Staff include accounting staff, library and clerical staff" (Q5), the listing reproducing the categorical line that the professional-title instruments draw within the public employee category (Circular 02/2022/TT-BVHTTDL for librarians, Circular 02/2021/TT-BGDĐT for teachers). Prin-F's account compresses the same point into a single phrase: "the office librarian and accountant" (Q4). Prin-J locates the post organisationally and procedurally: "the library belongs to the school's office group… decisions are reviewed by the principal. Difficult for making decisions" (Q8). The principals describe the placement as the operational reality of the school; they do not describe it as a choice they made.

Absence of the post (C1c). Three principals describe the school librarian post as not established at their school. Prin-D states the absence directly and generalises it: "no library staff. A teacher handles it as a concurrent duty… Primary schools generally do not have library staff" (Q2). Prin-E reaches the same conclusion across the sector: "nearly all schools don't have library staff, don't have dedicated personnel. The librarian is only someone doing it as a concurrent duty, not paid library wages" (Q5). Prin-F, asked about role importance, describes the absence as the binding condition: "there is no established staff position for library staff" (Q4). Where the post is statutorily peripheral and provincially controlled, a point taken up in Section 5.3, its non-establishment is the principal's lived reality, not a remediable local choice.

Disconfirming evidence: principal-level groupings (Prin-A, Prin-H). Two principals report the arrangement the Charter of primary schools prescribes. Prin-A

reports the librarian "assigned to the professional group with the teachers… they belong to the teacher group" (Q8); Prin-H reports a similar arrangement, with the librarian "placed in the group of all the homeroom teachers" (Q8). Circular 28/2020 places the person doing library work in the tổ chuyên môn, so these two schools follow the charter and the six at C1b do not. What this evidence locates is therefore not the limit of principal-level discretion but a gap between the charter's allocation and prevailing practice. The statutory category attaches to the professional title and its salary scale, which no grouping touches; the grouping the charter does prescribe is observed at two of the eight schools whose accounts address it.

Polish thread. The Polish teacher-librarian, as set out in Section 3, sits inside the teaching profession by statute (Teachers' Charter) with membership of the pedagogical council by right (Prawo oświatowe Article 69). The categorical fork that Vietnamese legislation takes one way, Polish legislation takes the other. The Vietnamese principals reproduce the support-staff/teacher line because their legislation draws it; the Polish system has no comparable categorical separation to reproduce.

Material conditions: what the placement determines

The legislative point. The cascade from the C1 placement, traced in Section 3, runs as follows: the grade IV school librarian salary scale at coefficients 1.86–4.06 under Decree 204/2004/NĐ-CP, qualifications floored at vocational secondary under Circular 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT Article 14, the absence of a teachers' preferential allowance and a promotion ladder gated by years of service and by examination or assessment. That ladder requires two years in the grade IV title for a college-qualified holder, three for a vocational-secondary one, before candidacy for grade III and nine years at grade III before grade II (Circular 02/2022/TT-BVHTTDL Articles 5 and 6). These conditions are not separately negotiated; they follow from where the statute places the position.

Low pay (C2b). Nine of the ten principals describe the librarian's pay as low. Prin-C reports a salary of "only 5 million" đồng monthly after "over ten years" in post, with "no allowances" (Q19). Prin-J reports a working tenure of approximately twenty years and "income less than 4 million a month" with "no allowance" beyond a low-income subsidy of "a few hundred a month" (Q19). Prin-F's librarian, on a "seasonal contract" arrangement (Q5), earns "2,800k [2.8 million đồng] a month" (Q4). Prin-H, working at a school with otherwise substantial library infrastructure, anchors the same finding to the salary structure: "By qualification – college level, coefficient 2.1 × basic salary. No additional income. No allowance. Extremely difficult level" (Q19). The coefficient Prin-H names is not a step on the grade IV scale as Joint Circular 02/2015 sets it. That instrument places a college-qualified appointee at step 2, coefficient 2.06, while 2.10 is step 1 of scale group A0 under Decree 204/2004. On either reading the placement sits above the grade IV floor of 1.86 and still below the 2.34 at which primary teachers enter A1.

Concurrent duties (C2d). Ten out of ten, with no disconfirming case, describe the librarian as also performing other functions. Some of what they describe is the post as Circular 16/2017 constitutes it: equipment (Prin-B, Prin-C, Prin-H, Prin-J) and information technology (Prin-F) fall inside the establishment that circular funds. The rest does not. Treasurer (Prin-G, Prin-H, Prin-I), office or clerical work (Prin-D, Prin-F, Prin-G), accounting (Prin-D, Prin-F), classroom teaching (Prin-D) and school health (Prin-H) sit in staffing groups the circular establishes separately; Prin-A and Prin-E describe concurrent duty without naming the other post. The combinations do not partition: four principals name more than one, and Prin-G describes "one person doing 3, 4 duties" (Q5). Prin-D's account of the staff configuration shows the cascade in detail: "there is a vice-principal in charge of the library. There are two clerical staff. There is a clerical staff member doing it as a concurrent duty. Two teachers doing library work as concurrent duty and one accountant doing it as concurrent duty" (Q7). The concurrent duty cascade is not an emergency arrangement made by the principal under unusual constraint; it is the operational form the grade IV support-staff post takes where the staffing framework funds at most one or two people for library, equipment and information technology combined, and attaches to the post a salary the accounts describe as too low to sustain a dedicated appointment. Where the principal needs the role filled and the legislation does not provide a viable post, concurrent duty is the lever the accounts predominantly describe; Prin-F's seasonal-contract arrangement is the one alternative the corpus records.

Sub-qualified hiring (C2a). Five of the ten principals describe librarians whose formal qualifications fall short of the LIS-specialised credential the grade IV school librarian title presumes. Prin-H's account is illustrative: "previously she studied a different field, after coming to the school was sent right away to a clerical and library class and to university" (Q5). Prin-J's librarian holds only "library elementary level" training and is engaged "under Decree 68 contract category" rather than as appointed public employee (Q2). Prin-E's incumbent is "service staff, no certification" (Q2). The professional title exists in the legislation; the credential pipeline that would populate it does not produce candidates at scale, and principals describe filling the post with available staff whose qualifications are then retrofitted on the job.

Training is reactive and ad hoc (C2c). Six principals describe training as occurring only when external arrangements provide for it. Prin-F: "if there's an official letter sending them, we send them. Outside seminars, bookstores, asking to participate" (Q7). Prin-J: "don't send them ourselves. If higher levels have a session, we send them. One or two years now no training" (Q7). Prin-G frames the consequence at sector level: "no regular professional development… general-school libraries are almost dead libraries" (Q7). CPD provision for school librarians is not specified at the legal density that Circular 19/2019 specifies for teachers; the principals' accounts testify to what that asymmetry produces in operation.

Disconfirming evidence: Prin-A on pay parity, Prin-A, Prin-C, Prin-H and Prin-I on training. Prin-A describes a salary arrangement that departs from the dominant pattern: "salary income paid per civil servant scale, coefficient equal to teachers'. Has hazard allowance" (Q19). Four principals describe regular training: Prin-A's librarian attends sessions "every year… according to the Education Department's plan" (Q7); Prin-H's is "currently studying university", sent annually "to participate in some training class or another" (Q7); Prin-C's school sends the librarian to "training classes organised by higher levels" (Q7); and Prin-I reports that the city "every year has training plans 2 sessions per regulations" (Q7). These cases mark the upper end of what was observed: where budgetary capacity exists locally, the public employee salary scale permits coefficient placement above the grade IV minimum and training can be regular. What the disconfirming cases do not extend to is the categorical placement itself. Prin-A's librarian remains on the public-employee scale and holds concurrent duties (Q19, Q6); no account in the corpus, Prin-A's included, describes a librarian appointed to a teacher's professional title. Local arrangement can move conditions within the bounds the placement sets; it does not move the bounds.

Polish thread. The Polish entitlements set out in Section 3 (advancement ladder, teacher salary grid, qualification requirements, a defined teaching load) cascade from the C1 placement: the Polish librarian receives the conditions because of category membership, not despite it.

Decision-making and governance

The legislative point. Two structural features detailed in Section 3 share one form: authority over the librarian is held outside the school. Authority over the post itself (its establishment and the school's staffing numbers) flows to the province under Decree 106/2020/NĐ-CP: to the People's Committee for job position and public-employee structure (Articles 6(3) and 14), and to the People's Council for the staffing quota (Article 13). Authority over the librarian's professional identity is divided across three ministries: MOET, MOCST and MOHA. The school principal creates proposals; others decide on them. Principals' accounts testify to what this distributed-authority arrangement produces in practice.

Recruitment authority is external (C3a). Seven of the ten principals describe the librarian as recruited and assigned through mechanisms outside the school. Prin-B is explicit about the system: "like teacher recruitment, under the general recruitment mechanism of the Department of Internal Affairs coordinating with Education to do" (Q5). Prin-I states the chain in similar terms: "the State recruits and establishes formally, and they are a civil servant of the school" (Q5). The principal does not hire; the principal receives staff hired elsewhere.

Within-school authority is bounded (C3c, C3e). What principals can decide is described in the same narrow domain in every account that addresses it: book purchases, library activity scheduling, evaluation of work performed. Prin-A's

account of the book-purchase decision is representative: “the librarian in charge proposes, passes through the professional affairs officer for evaluation. She approves it, submits to the principal, the principal is the one who signs off” (Q14). The chain is internal to the school and bounded to operational matters; it does not extend to post creation, classification, or pay scale. Where the principal needs to address staffing inadequacy, the lever the accounts predominantly describe is concurrent-duty assignment (C3e), which Prin-D’s vice-principal-plus-clerical-plus-accountant cascade illustrates (Q7). The principal can ask existing staff to do additional library work; the principal cannot create a librarian post.

Governance fragmentation, witnessed not named (C4). Six of ten principals provide passages the analysis reads as evidence of cross-ministry fragmentation; none names the system as such. The figure therefore counts analytical readings rather than participant statements, unlike the counts reported for the other codes, and its leading item is one already counted at C2d. The concurrent duty cascade described in Section 5.2 is the operational shape of the cross-ministry division: one ministry’s salary structure making another ministry’s post non-viable. Prin-G’s account of inspection captures the consequence of inconsistent rules across regulatory authorities: “inspection teams come, inspect, then leave it there” (Q7). External substitution (C4a) appears across the interviews: Room to Read training and color-code methods (Prin-D Q3, Q5), and the Hải Phòng “Footsteps of Books” project (Prin-B Q3). Principals describe living inside the fragmentation; the ministerial division that produces it does not appear in their accounts. The witness frame admits this: principals are positioned to evidence the consequences of the regulatory system, not to theorise the system itself.

Polish thread. Professional regulation of the Polish teacher-librarian is largely unified within the education system: the school director drafts the staffing plan, and the operating authority (typically the commune) approves it and thereby decides the librarian post’s actual extent (Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2015; Prawo oświatowe Article 110). The structural decision is the opposite of Vietnam’s: authority held locally, at the school and commune level, rather than centralised at province, fragmentation absent rather than distributed across three ministries. The local locus of decision-making does not, however, produce uniformly enabling outcomes. The 1999 abolition of the national staffing norm (Osiecka-Chojnacka, 2015) leaves the operating authority with no binding standard, producing informal ratios that vary by locality from roughly one post per 300 students to one per 600. This dependency on local goodwill mirrors what Vietnamese centralisation produces by the opposite route. The convergence is informative in a limited way: the same dependency arises under both arrangements, so the locus of authority does not by itself account for it.

Curriculum expectations and enablement

The expectation–enablement structure described in Section 3 has the following form. The reading-culture frame comes from Decision 329/QĐ-TTg, while the General

Education Curriculum (Circular 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT) carries the habit of reading among its aims and expects library use in particular subjects; Circular 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT converts these, at its Level 2 standard, into specific demands on the library and on the person who staffs it. Those demands post-date the interviews, which were conducted under Decision 01/2003/QĐ-BGDĐT; the accounts below therefore describe the baseline against which the current standard was later written, not compliance with it. That instrument was not silent on the post, however: its Article 9 required every school to assign a staff member or a teacher to library work, and made pay follow the category. A teacher who took library work as a concurrent duty kept teacher salary and the other standards of a classroom teacher, while a librarian who was not a teacher was paid on the culture and information scale. The categorical split this article traces was therefore already operative when the interviews were conducted. Funding works through the integration mechanism: implementation funds integrated through other approved programmes under Decision 329/QĐ-TTg rather than a dedicated line. The curriculum expects librarians to guide students in selecting and reading materials, that is, to exercise pedagogical agency, but the support-staff placement described at Section 5.1 places that agency outside the categorical scope of the position. The expectation is uniform across the system; the five C5 sub-codes track the enablement.

Funding (C5a). Eight of ten principals describe funding as a binding shortfall. Where a 3% recurrent-expenditure figure appears in the accounts, it operates as a ceiling rather than as a floor; other principals report no dedicated library allocation at all. Prin-G reports “budget source not much: 3% of recurrent expenditure, 10 million” (Q11). Prin-C reports “no budget allocation dedicated to the library. There is a general budget, balanced in detail. Purchasing materials each year for about 20 million” (Q17), the absence of a dedicated line being precisely what the integration mechanism prescribes. Prin-D reports “20 million per year. Basically books” (Q17). Prin-H, by contrast, at a school with substantial provincial investment, reports “15–20 million out of 500 million” (Q17). Where the mechanism operates, the outcome still varies. Where the school’s recurrent expenditure is large, 3% covers library activity adequately; where it is small, 3% binds. The disconfirming cases are Prin-J’s report that materials are “complete: newspapers, magazines” (Q13), Prin-A’s “every year there are additions, recently received funding. Materials are enough for the children to read” (Q13) and Prin-H’s report that the library “[m]eets readers’ needs quite well” (Q12): adequacy reported where recurrent expenditure is large enough to satisfy operational needs.

Infrastructure (C5b). Infrastructure is the most contested code in the analysis, with the highest disconfirming rate of any code. Severe deficit appears at Prin-D (“one classroom used as a library, area 48 m²”, Q2), Prin-E (“insufficient area – one classroom… 30 m²”, Q2), and Prin-J (“no library room, only a library storeroom… not according to Circular 13 standards”, Q2 and Q9; the reference is evidently to Circular 13/2020/TT-BGDĐT, the school physical-facility standards

then in force, whose primary-school provisions require a library with prescribed functional zones and, at Level 1, reading rooms of a minimum size). Substantial provision appears at Prin-H (smart library 80 m² plus 400 m² yard library) and Prin-I (provincial standard-reaching investment); Prin-A reports an area at under half the regulated figure, with an open-library workaround to compensate: “the library according to regulations is 120 m². The school has over 50 m²” (Q2). The variation tracks local-contingent factors such as provincial investment, principal initiative and NGO partnership. It does not track statutory placement.

Programmatic expectation unmet (C5c). Nine principals describe the curriculum’s reading-culture expectations as not fulfilled. Prin-C: “no library class periods yet. No room yet so unable to organise [them]. Next year when the library is finished, class periods will be organised” (Q4). Prin-E: “no activities at all yet” (Q18). Prin-G: “general-school libraries are almost dead libraries” (Q7). The expectation is set uniformly at the legislative level; its non-fulfilment is reported as systemic in their accounts.

Pedagogical agency held by teachers, not librarians (C5d). Five principals describe a pattern in which reading periods, when they occur, are led by teachers and supported by librarians, or in which the principal substitutes for the librarian’s professional function. Prin-D: “every teacher is a library staff member. Organising library activities like book introductions, oratory – teachers take charge” (Q18). Prin-J describes the substitution explicitly: “Weak library staff can’t propose additions – the principal has to review everything. No professional skills, so it’s poor” (Q4); and again at Q14: “the principal is the one proposing because staff are weak” (Q14). The principals describe this as a competence problem about individual librarians. The structural reading is that pedagogical agency is statutorily unavailable to the grade IV support-staff position: Circular 16/2022 Article 14 makes designing and running library reading periods a duty of the person doing library work, while the pedagogical standing those periods require sits outside the categorical scope of the post that person holds.

Community substitution (C5e). Seven principals describe the gap between expectation and enablement as filled by parents, students and community contributions. Prin-I’s account is structural: “education socialization: each theme, one student brings one book to exchange” (Q14); annual library funding “30–40 million per year. Mainly from socialization [community contributions]” (Q17). Prin-F describes the parent-mobilisation arrangement: “mobilizing parents to contribute suitable books + money. Parent book cabinets” (Q18). The substitutions sustain operation; they do not address the structural gap that produces the need for them.

Synthesis: the cumulative reading

The four subsections taken together describe a single structural pattern. Vietnamese legislation places the school librarian in the support-staff category (Section 5.1); the placement determines the salary, qualification and training conditions principals

report, and permits the concurrent-duty arrangements they describe (Section 5.2); authority over the placement and its consequences is held outside the school, distributed across three ministries that do not coordinate (Section 5.3); the curriculum framework's expectations of what libraries and librarians should deliver are uniform across the system, while enablement varies according to local conditions that move within the bounds the placement sets (Section 5.4). The conditions administered above the school (salary scale, the grade IV professional title, external recruitment authority) are set by national instruments and lie outside the school's authority to alter; on its own that fixity would establish little. Two findings go beyond that. All ten principals describe the concurrent-duty cascade, an arrangement the staffing circular then in force permitted but did not mandate (Circular 16/2017/TT-BGDĐT Articles 2 and 6). The Charter of primary schools' inclusion of the librarian in the professional group is observed at two of the eight schools whose accounts address it, the other six grouping the librarian with office staff. Both findings point the same way: the Charter seats the librarian in the professional group and Circular 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT's Level 2 standard, the tier a school must reach for national-standard recognition, loads the position with reading periods, library-based lessons and pupil reading targets, while the staffing instrument funded that work, together with equipment and information technology, at one person in delta-region schools of 27 classes or fewer. Mandate and establishment issue from the same ministry and do not meet. What varies is what is left to local enforcement or to no instrument at all: room area, collection adequacy, partnership relationships. The contribution lies in that contrast rather than in the asymmetry as such: the prescriptions a school cannot administer are fixed beyond its reach, those it can administer are largely unmet and the force of the placement is visible in which is which.

Hartzell's "invisible school librarian" thesis (1997, 2002) describes a similar outcome (librarians invisible to school leadership) through a perception lens; the Vietnamese case shows that in a centralised state-employee system, invisibility is statutorily produced rather than perceptually produced. The Polish parallel threaded through the discussion shows that placement in the teacher category does not by itself produce uniformly enabling conditions; it removes one structural cause of disenablement and leaves others (the 1999 staffing-norm vacuum, operating-authority discretion under-girded by no binding standard) in place. The convergence of Vietnamese centralisation and Polish local decision-making on a similar dependency on local goodwill shows that the locus of authority does not by itself determine staffing adequacy. What the Polish statutes show directly is what the teacher category entails once granted: council membership by right, the teacher salary grid, the advancement ladder, a defined teaching load. Those follow from placement as legal entailments rather than as inferences drawn from a two-case comparison.

Limitations

Seven limitations bound the claims advanced in this article. The first four are objective, arising from the corpus as it was inherited and not open to revision here; the fifth and sixth are subjective, following from decisions taken in this study; the seventh is neither, stating a scope condition on the finding rather than a shortcoming in the work.

First, the corpus is the product of an earlier study with a different analytical lens. The question schedule, while broad, was not designed against the present coding scheme.

Second, the corpus contains principal accounts only. Librarian voices are not present, and the principal–librarian relationship is read here from one side. Principals can witness the consequences of the legislative framework but not provide the librarian's own account of living within it, and the most affected actors do not speak in these interviews.

Third, ten principals across seven Red River Delta provinces is a small, geographically bounded and primary-school-specific corpus. The cascade pattern documented here may operate differently at secondary level, in southern Vietnam, in private-school configurations, or in the urban–rural distribution of other regions.

Fourth, the September 2021 fieldwork was conducted during the nationwide school closures of the pandemic's fourth wave. The pandemic bears differently on different codes. Classification as public employee rather than teacher (C1) and the salary and recruitment mechanisms it determines (C2, C3) are matters of statute unaffected by a temporary closure. One principal's account (Prin-F) describes adapting a reading-promotion activity to video submission during the closure, with no corresponding change to staffing, salary or recruitment, which is consistent with the study's claim that these conditions are structurally rather than operationally determined. Programmatic and infrastructure conditions (C5) describe arrangements principals reported as standing rather than pandemic-specific, though some may reflect the closure period's particular rhythm rather than a stable baseline. The fieldwork also pre-dates nine subsequent Vietnamese instruments: Circulars 02/2022/TT-BVHTTDL, 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT, 10/2023/TT-BVHTTDL and 20/2023/TT-BGDĐT, the 2025 Law on Teachers (Luật Nhà giáo, No. 73/2025/QH15), Resolution 248/2025/QH15, Circulars 30/2026/TT-BGDĐT and 31/2026/TT-BGDĐT, and Decree 182/2026/NĐ-CP. All nine preserve the categorical distinction against which the 2021 findings are interpreted. The two 2026 circulars, in force from 14 April, rebuilt the teacher professional-title and salary framework without reaching the school librarian, since both apply to nhà giáo (teachers). The allowance instruments of December 2025 and May 2026 confirm the distinction directly.

Fifth, the second-coder verification was based on discussion-based reconciliation rather than independent parallel coding. Inter-coder agreement statistics, such as Cohen's kappa, are therefore not reported.

Sixth, the comparative element rests on statutory texts and secondary scholarship for the Polish case, and no Polish fieldwork was conducted. The Polish material is included to establish what follows when the categorical decision is made the other way, and statutory sources are suited to that purpose.

Seventh, the mechanism identified here is specific to systems that place school library staff in a civil-service category distinct from teachers and that set salary, professional title and recruitment above the school. Where library staffing is determined locally, or where librarians already hold teaching status, this analysis offers a structural contrast rather than a template, and its recommendations do not transfer without restatement in the terms of the receiving system.

Conclusion

Reading ten Vietnamese primary school principals' accounts against the legislative framework that classifies the school librarian's position has produced a consistent finding. The conditions administered above the school (salary scale, the grade IV professional title, external recruitment authority) are set by national instruments and lie outside the school's authority to alter. All ten principals describe the librarian holding concurrent duties, an arrangement the staffing circular then in force permitted; the grouping the Charter of primary schools does prescribe is observed at two of the eight schools whose accounts address it, the other six grouping the librarian otherwise; and the conditions the instruments state as standards but leave to local enforcement vary with local circumstance. What the school is asked to deliver and what the staffing circular funds (one person, alongside equipment and information technology, in schools of 27 classes or fewer) are set by the same ministry, and they do not meet. The categorical placement, rather than local discretion or principal disposition, is what fixes the school librarian's professional identity in the system these interviews describe.

The threefold contribution set out in Section 1 follows from this reading. Its methodological element is the one most readily transferred: principal interviews, read as witness-evidence against a legislative coding scheme, function as a low-cost structural diagnostic wherever the most affected actors are statutorily peripheral and difficult to access.

The policy implication that follows from the structural reading is direct. Reform directed at improving librarian motivation, pedagogical training, principal awareness or library advocacy (the dominant prescriptions in the existing principal–librarian literature) addresses downstream consequences of the support-staff placement, not the placement itself. Whether downstream-only reform can produce upstream effects on school librarian professional identity is an empirical question this article cannot resolve; the prediction implied by the analysis is that it cannot, because the conditions administered above the school are precisely those that no local circumstance can vary, and downstream reform reaches none of them.

Recommendations

The following recommendations follow from the analysis presented in Section 5 and from the structural reading consolidated in Sections 5.5 and 7. They are addressed to the institutional actors with corresponding authority over the variables the analysis identifies.

1. **The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) should review the categorical placement of the school librarian within the support-staff/teacher division.** The conditions administered above the school are set by national instruments outside the school's authority to alter, and the analysis indicates that reform directed at downstream conditions narrows specific gaps without reaching that placement. A reclassification review need not commit to a particular outcome; it would, however, surface for legislative deliberation a categorical decision that has so far operated below the threshold of explicit policy debate. Coordination with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) on the public employee employment regime and with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MOCST) on the professional library classification is a precondition for any such review to take effect.
2. **Provincial Departments of Education should monitor and report compliance with the school library standards specified in Circular 16/2022/TT-BGDĐT.** The interviews evidence substantial variation in school library infrastructure against the standards that circular sets, variation that is amenable to provincial-level standards enforcement. Where a 3% figure appears in the accounts it operates as a ceiling rather than as a floor; provincial authorities can identify schools where the allocation binds and direct supplementary investment. Because the numeric criteria belong to the circular's Level 2 tier, monitoring would also show how many schools are positioned to seek national-standard recognition at all.
3. **LIS training institutions should expand school librarian-specific curricular tracks and ensure that the qualification routes Circular 16/2022 Article 14 recognises are routinely available to candidates across the country.** The interviews show recurrent under-qualification, with librarians retrofitted into the post from adjacent fields. A more reliable training pipeline would not, on its own, alter the categorical placement, but it would address the C2a sub-qualification pattern the interviews document and would equip librarians for the pedagogical demands the curriculum framework places on the position even where the statutory placement does not formally license those demands.
4. **School principals should place the librarian in the professional group, as the Charter of primary schools requires.** Circular 28/2020/TT-BGDĐT assigns the person doing library work to the tổ chuyên môn alongside teachers, and two of the eight schools whose accounts address it do so, the other six grouping the librarian with office, accounting or clerical staff instead. Compliance costs nothing and affects daily working relationships, access to professional

discussion and the legibility of the librarian's role to teaching colleagues. It does not change the statutory category, and it cannot substitute for the structural reform that would.

5. **Researchers in school librarianship should investigate the librarian's own account of occupying the support-staff position, the operational dimensions of the categorical placement at secondary level and outside the Red River Delta and the cross-national applicability of the structural-witness method demonstrated here.** The interviews presented in this article evidence the principals' view; the most affected actors do not speak in it. A study with librarians as primary informants would address what principal interviews cannot. Comparative work in other centralised state-employee education systems, and a symmetric study with Polish primary data, would test whether the convergent-outcomes finding documented through Polish secondary sources holds at the level of present-day school operation.

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