

Autonomy Governance Transformation in the Higher Education Institutions Towards the Typical Models in Vietnam

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Based on existing studies on university autonomy, particularly university autonomy in Vietnam, along with the examination of legal documents about the higher education system in Vietnam, and the findings from field surveys and surveys conducted on various higher education institution websites, this article aims to elucidate the autonomy model of higher education institutions. In doing so, it highlights the current state of autonomy in Vietnamese higher education. It identifies the dimensions missing from previous studies concerning university owners, both at the institutional and practical levels. The article outlines five major autonomy models for higher education institutions, which are formed by a system of mechanisms and policies in higher education. For each of these models, the research considers, analyzes, and evaluates the level of autonomy in terms of decision-making rights and self-responsibility across three fundamental areas of the university: organizational and personnel autonomy, academic autonomy, and autonomy in finance and facilities.

Keywords: university, autonomy, organizational-personnel, academic, finance

RATIONALE

In the context of the market economy and the globalization trend, extensive international integration has made university autonomy an essential and indispensable trend. Autonomy is seen as crucial for enhancing the quality of education, scientific research, and service provision, contributing to the development of Vietnam's higher education (HE) system. It also plays a vital role in providing the necessary human resources to meet domestic, regional, and international labor market demands. Autonomy fosters dynamism within universities, stimulates healthy competition among institutions, and enhances the accountability and responsibility of leaders and officials. In recent times, there has been lively implementation and discussion on the issue of university autonomy in Vietnam. However, examining the current state of Vietnamese university autonomy is important. What model is being followed? What are the available forms? What specific aspects define their autonomy? These questions require answers for the state

to establish appropriate directions and mechanisms to promote autonomy in higher education institutions (HEIs).

Numerous papers have been published on the models and status of university autonomy in various countries, regions, and specifically in Vietnam. Some notable examples include “University Autonomy in Twenty Countries” by Anderson, D. and Johnson, J. (1998); “Global Trends in University Governance” by Fielden, J. (2008); “University Autonomy” by Noor, M. M. (2017); “University Autonomy in Europe II” by Nokkala, T. and Steinel, M. (2011); “Diverging Paths? Institutional Autonomy and Academic Freedom in the European Higher Education Area” by Matei, L. and Iwinska, J. (2018). Comparing the regulatory frameworks of institutions to those of previous decades, it has been observed that university autonomy has generally increased over the long term, despite the existence of various restrictions. In interviews, participants expressed satisfaction with the level of institutional freedom compared to the past (Thomas E. et al., 2011). Regarding global patterns of control in higher education, Ordorika I. (2003) identified three domains in which universities can exercise autonomy. Chinese universities, for example, have experienced greater freedom in the appointment of academics and in making curricular decisions within the academic domain (Mei Li and Rui Yang, 2014). Nguyen, M. T. (2014) evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of Vietnam’s higher education system at a time when the government had not yet implemented policies to allow several universities to pilot autonomy. Hoang, T. X. H. (2012) discusses the inevitable trend of higher education in Vietnam within the context of globalization.

Most of the research has tried to identify and clarify the nature of university autonomy in an approach consistent with the research. Some studies have paid careful attention to the analysis of the elements of university autonomy (Anderson, D. and Johnson, J. (1998); Estermann, T.; Nokkala, T. and Steinel, M. (2011), ...); Matei, L. and Iwinska, J. (2018) are interested in analyzing the development of the interaction between university autonomy and academic freedom in EHEA. Another part of the research looks at the university autonomy of countries such as Noor, M. M. (2017) studying the situation of university autonomy in Pakistan, Nguyen, M. T. (2014), H. T. X. Hoa (2012), Pham, T. T. H. (2018) studies the situation of university autonomy in Vietnam mostly in terms of mechanism, system. Decentralization, which helps to bring a more institutional autonomy, is considered crucial for HEIs in Vietnam to enhance teaching and research quality output and the VNUs are often referred to as examples of such autonomy (Hayden and Lam 2007, Dapice, D. et al. 2008, The World Bank 2008). The question of reforming the organizational and decision-making structures plays a special role in this debate. This tendency towards deregulation has two main aspects (i) to increase the financial autonomy, some state authorities have changed the mechanism by which the universities receive their funding; (ii) state authorities want to reduce their involvement in “institutional management affairs”. This would lead to the universities’ greater “process autonomy” (Matthias Kreysing, 2002).

In addition to the research, as mentioned earlier, numerous studies analyze the models of university autonomy in other countries, drawing lessons for Vietnam’s context. Several studies provide in-depth analyses of autonomy models implemented by HEIs that have piloted autonomy mechanisms. For instance, “Autonomy of Public HEIs: International Experience and Vietnam’s Practices” by Nguyen, T. T. (2018) and “Autonomy of HE – Singapore’s Experience and Lessons for Vietnam” by Tran, T. T. (2018) offer comprehensive examinations of autonomy models in HEIs. The availability of published scientific works demonstrates the existence of research focused on analyzing and generalizing the current models of university autonomy within Vietnam’s higher education system. These studies aim to provide a clearer understanding of the reality of university autonomy in Vietnam.

Accordingly, this paper aims to provide an overview of the major autonomy models employed by Vietnamese HEIs through theoretical and practical studies. The analysis will shed light on the actual autonomy content within these models, considering both the mechanisms in place and the practical implementation. The focus will be on examining the key elements of university autonomy to understand the current state of autonomy in Vietnamese HEIs.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY MODEL

There are multiple perspectives with different approaches to university autonomy. According to Matei, L. and Iwinska, J. (2018), university autonomy encompasses aspects of the relationship between HEIs and the external world, including government regulations, public and private funding organizations, partnerships with industrial or non-governmental organizations, and international organizations. However, the fundamental basis for these approaches depends on the state's role in its relationship with HEIs. The reduction of state intervention and management signifies a strengthening of the autonomy and self-governance of HEIs. Additionally, there is a general trend in university autonomy today towards regulating the labor market.

John Fielden (2008) identified four models of university autonomy as outlined below: the state control model observed in Malaysia, the semi-autonomous model seen in France and New Zealand, the semi-independent model observed in Singapore, and the independent model observed in the UK and Australia. Even in a model of complete state control, universities still maintain a certain level of autonomy. The independent model still has expectations regarding the state's influence on the university, particularly concerning strategic direction and accountability requirements.

On one hand, based on the fundamental approaches to HE autonomy and the context of decentralization between HEIs and governing bodies or higher authorities within this study, university autonomy is defined in terms of the level of decision-making rights and self-responsibility HEIs possess over crucial activities. This definition allows for the analysis of the autonomy of Vietnamese HEIs in the present context.

On the other hand, HEIs have the authority to determine the areas of their activities in which they exercise autonomy, including organization, institutional management, personnel, training, scientific research, community services, financing, infrastructure development, facility procurement, and asset management. The European University Association's autonomy assessment framework evaluates the level of autonomy in HEIs across four main dimensions: organizational and institutional autonomy, financial autonomy, academic autonomy, and personnel autonomy (Thomas Estermann, Terhi Nokkala & Monika Steinel, 2011).

Anderson, D. and Johnson, J. (1998) mentioned elements of university autonomy, including Self-control in human resources, autonomy in matters related to enrollment and student management, autonomy in academic activities and educational programs, autonomy in academic standards; autonomy in research, publishing and teaching; self-control in matters related to administration, finance, management, and school's budget and resources.

In Vietnam, Article 4 of the Law amends and supplements several articles of the Law on HE (2018), defining: "Autonomy is the right of a HEIs to set its own goals and choose how to accomplish them; self-determination and accountability for professional, academic, organizational, human resource, financial, property, and other activities based on law and competence of HEIs".

Based on the opinions of the researchers and the Vietnam HE Law, this study reviews and describes HEI's autonomy according to their decision-making rights and self-responsibility in different fields. Basic operations are as follows: *First*, the field of organization and personnel, which includes the decision to establish the University Council; to develop the university's strategies and policies; on the establishment, division, dissolution or merger of attached organizations; on the structure and number of people working, recruiting officials. *Second*, the field of training and scientific research (collectively referred to as academic); which includes opening training courses at all levels; determine enrollment quotas, organize enrollment; perform quality accreditation; decide on research directions and take part in scientific and technological tasks; providing public services. *Thirdly*, the financial sector; including ensuring the entire operation and operational expenses, setting the appropriate tuition fee for each training activities; salary and income regulations; regulations on the use of revenue sources; decide with investment projects to use the unit's revenue source.

In Vietnam, Article 4 of the Law on Higher Education (2018) defines autonomy as the right of HEIs to establish their own goals and determine how to achieve them, taking responsibility for professional,

academic, organizational, human resource, financial, property, and other activities within the framework of the law and their competencies.

Considering the viewpoints of researchers and the provisions of the Vietnam HE Law, this study aims to review and describe the autonomy of HEIs based on their decision-making authority and self-responsibility in different areas. The key areas are as follows:

- Organization and personnel: This includes decisions related to the establishment of the University Council, development of strategies and policies, establishment, division, dissolution, or merger of affiliated organizations, determination of the organizational structure and workforce, and recruitment of officials.
- Training and scientific research (referred to as the academic field): This encompasses the opening of training courses at all levels, determination of enrollment quotas, organization of admissions, quality accreditation, decision-making on research directions, participation in scientific and technological tasks, and provision of public services.
- Finance: This involves ensuring the overall operation and regular expenses of the HEI, setting appropriate tuition fees for different training activities, regulations on salaries and income, guidelines on using revenue sources, and decision-making on investment projects utilizing the institution's revenue.

By analyzing the autonomy of HEIs, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent of autonomy and decision-making rights exercised by HEIs in Vietnam.

RESEARCH METHOD

To assess the readiness of each model of university autonomy in Vietnam, this research focuses on three key elements: organizational and personnel autonomy, academic autonomy, and financial and facilities autonomy. The analysis will be conducted by examining relevant legal documents, including decisions, circulars, and other government guidelines about each type of university. The research aims to identify the number of autonomy models in Vietnamese higher education and highlight the distinctions between each model.

The study employs two main research methods: theoretical research methods and field survey methods. Theoretical research methods involve a comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature, legal documents, and theoretical frameworks related to university autonomy. Field survey methods will collect data and insights directly from universities, administrators, and relevant stakeholders. This combination of methods allows for a comprehensive examination of the autonomy models and their practical implementation in Vietnamese HEIs.

Group of Theoretical Research Methods

- Method of document research (Trinh, V. M., Dang, B. L., 2020): The research has been conducted on various documents that explore the nature and content of modern autonomy. These documents provide components and indicators that facilitate the generalization of the university autonomy model. This method serves as an important theoretical basis for analyzing legal documents specific to the Vietnamese HE system, particularly those concerning the organization and operation of HEIs. It aids in the generalization of the university autonomy model in Vietnam.
- Modeling method (Trinh, V. M., Dang, B. L., 2020): By considering the autonomy of groups of HEIs, this research approach aims to generalize and form theoretical models. These theoretical models have proven to be highly valuable in analyzing the autonomy content of each group of Vietnamese HEIs. They provide a framework for understanding and studying the autonomy models within the Vietnamese context.

Group of Field Survey Methods

Group discussion (Rosaline Barbour, Jenny Kitzinger, 1998): Group discussion is a qualitative research method that proves useful in clarifying and understanding university autonomy within the selected HEIs.

The paper's content is based on the outcomes of 15 group discussions conducted with leaders and teachers from 15 HEIs. These discussions delve into the reality of university autonomy implementation, covering topics such as organizing and personnel, academic matters, and financial and facilities management. The sample selected for the survey through group discussions is diverse and representative, spanning across different regions of the country and encompassing all components and types of HEIs, as depicted in Table 1.

TABLE 1
TYPES OF HEIs AND LEGAL AUTONOMY STATEMENT

No	Name of HEIs	Legal of governance/Autonomy statement
1	Vietnam National Universities	Prime Minister's Decision No. 26/2014 / QD-TTg
2	Regional universities	MoET's Circular No. 08/2014 / TT-BGDĐT
3	Public universities (piloting autonomy mechanism)	Resolution 77 / QD-CP (Prime Minister, 2014)
4	Public universities (Others)	Government Regulations (MoET, Finance, Home Affairs...)
5	Private university	The People's Committee of the province / city where the HEI is located.

Data from the websites of HEIs: According to regulations set by the Vietnamese State, HEIs are required to publicly provide information on various aspects of their training quality. This includes details on the institution's structure, human resources, implemented training programs, training results, scientific research activities, existing facilities and systems, and financial implementation at the facility. The information available on HEIs' websites serves as a valuable source of information for research purposes.

The research conducted web surveys of multiple Vietnamese HEIs to collect data related to all the components mentioned above. By analyzing the gathered information, the research sought to gain insights into the state of university autonomy and its implementation across various institutions in Vietnam.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to Article 7 of the Law on HE (2018), Vietnamese HEIs are granted legal entity status. The types of HEIs in Vietnam include two categories:

- Public HEIs: These establishments are funded and invested by the State. They ensure the necessary operational conditions and act as representatives of the owner.
- Private HEIs: These institutions are invested in by either domestic or foreign investors, who are responsible for ensuring the operational conditions of the private HEIs.

From a mechanism and legal perspective, HEIs in Vietnam must comply with the state's general legal documents and specific regulations pertaining to their operations. The dominance of these specific regulations has led to the formation of different groups of HEIs in Vietnam, each with its own organizational structure, level of decision-making authority, and self-responsibility in various organizational, academic, and financial domains. This variation in autonomy levels among HEIs in Vietnam provides the basis for examining and understanding the different university autonomy models present in the country (Hai & Anh, 2022).

In this article, the author will focus on discussing the major autonomy models observed in Vietnamese HEIs, while acknowledging that certain specific models, such as those followed by recently established HEIs, may not be covered extensively within this study. By analyzing and describing the key autonomy models, the authors aim to provide an overview of the university autonomy landscape in Vietnam.

Autonomy Model at Vietnam National University

Currently in Vietnam, there are two national universities: the Vietnam National University (VNU) in Hanoi and the Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City. The organization and operation of these universities and their member HEIs are guided by and comply with the Prime Minister's Decision No. 26/2014/QĐ-TTg. This decision outlines the autonomy framework for the VNU, and its implantation is reflected in various aspects of their operations. The following are some key areas of autonomy for the VNU, as specified in the aforementioned document and observed in practice:

In terms of *organizational and personnel autonomy*, the National University Council plays a significant role in the VNU. The council is established by the Chair of the VNU, and the appointment and dismissal of the Chair of the VNU Council, as well as the President of the VNU, are made by the Prime Minister. The President of the VNU has decision-making authority regarding the establishment, merger, division, splitting, and dissolution of units that are attached to the VNU, based on the resolutions of the VNU Council. The VNU is responsible for formulating strategies and policies for human resource development within its scope. It establishes standards and guidelines for hiring, managing, using, appointing, dismissing, transferring, and rotating officials and employees throughout the VNU, ensuring uniformity across its affiliated units. Recruitment and arrangement of staff, public employees, and employees into professional and job titles within the affiliated units are also the responsibilities of the VNU. These provisions highlight the organizational and personnel autonomy of the VNU, allowing it to exercise decision-making authority and take responsibility in matters related to its internal structure, human resource management, and organizational development.

Regarding *academic autonomy*, the President of the VNU holds decision-making authority in several key areas. They have the power to introduce new training programs listed in the List of State-run training programs. Additionally, the President has the discretion to pilot undergraduate, master's, and doctoral training programs that are not yet listed. Still, they are required to report to the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) regarding these programs. The VNU and its member units are also free to develop and utilize training programs from foreign universities with a high ranking. The VNU is responsible for the admission process, including decision-making and accountability in this area. They are also responsible for issuing appropriate Training Regulations that align with the university's model and characteristics.

Furthermore, the VNU has the authority to direct and organize scientific and technological activities within the university. They are assigned specific science and technology research programs and subjects. The VNU can pilot new models and mechanisms for managing scientific research activities and technology transfer. Moreover, the VNU undertakes research tasks to provide scientific foundations for formulating the country's socioeconomic development strategies, guidelines, policies, and plans. They are also responsible for issuing internal regulations and guidelines regarding evaluation criteria and quality assurance within the VNU. These provisions demonstrate the academic autonomy of the VNU, allowing it to make independent decisions and take responsibility for various academic activities, including program development, admission processes, scientific research, and quality assurance.

Autonomy in finance and facilities is an important aspect of the VNU's operations. As the VNU carries out national strategic tasks, it receives significant investments and support from the government. A large proportion of the VNU's revenue comes from the state budget, as reported on the public websites of the three states. For instance, in 2017, the state budget accounted for 52.1% of the total revenue of VNU Hanoi¹. The VNU operates under a specific financial mechanism prescribed by the government, granting it a high level of autonomy in financial activities. It has the authority to determine the content and rate of revenue and expenses, ensuring a balance between sources of revenue and expenses following the capabilities of the VNU and state regulations. The VNU also sets tuition fees appropriate for high-quality training programs. In addition to financial autonomy, the VNU is responsible for developing strategies and plans for developing its technical material bases. It oversees the construction, management, and coordination of technical facilities within the VNU. As a two-level university model, the VNU consists of member universities and other scientific research and training units. While the member universities do not have their university councils, they are jointly managed by the VNU Council. Each VNU, whether in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City, grants autonomy to its member units based on government regulations and each institution's

specific characteristics and conditions. While the decentralization within each VNU and its member universities is generally similar, there may be certain differences in specific areas of activity.

Overall, the VNU enjoys a high level of autonomy granted by the state. It has decision-making authority and responsibility in various areas of activity, including organizational structure, human resources, academia, international relations, finance, procurement, and infrastructure management. The MoET primarily performs inspection and supervision to ensure compliance with regulations on education and training as part of its role in state management. Surveys on the autonomy of VNUs and their member HEIs have shown that most of the rights and responsibilities outlined in Decision 26 have been implemented and fully carried out. However, it should be noted that the VNU still relies on the state budget for investment spending, which places certain constraints on its financial autonomy. Additionally, the VNU is subject to regulations from other ministries such as the MoET, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Home Affairs, and specific government regulations.

Autonomy Model at Regional University

The Regional Universities (RU) in Vietnam, namely Thai Nguyen University, Hue University, and Da Nang University are public universities that operate in accordance with Circular No. 08/2014/TT-BGDĐT issued by the MoET. An actual survey conducted on the autonomy issue at Da Nang University, Thai Nguyen University, and the member HEIs of the three RU has revealed that a significant portion of the regulations regarding the rights and responsibilities of these organizations, as outlined in Circular 08, has been fully and diligently implemented. This is evident in several key fields of activity:

Organizational and personnel autonomy is an important aspect of the RU system in Vietnam. The autonomy in this area is reflected in the following key elements:

- RU Council: The members of the RU Council are assigned by the RU Chair. The Chair of the RU council and the president and vice president of the RU are appointed and dismissed by the MoET after negotiations with the local administration where the RU is located.
- Decision-making organizational structure: The RU has the authority to make decisions regarding the establishment, merger, division, splitting, and dissolution of units attached to the RU. This decision-making power allows the RU to shape its organizational structure and adapt it to the evolving needs and goals of the university.
- Human resources development: The RU is responsible for promulgating strategies and policies for developing human resources within the university. This includes consistently formulating guidelines and standards for hiring, managing, utilizing, appointing, dismissing, transferring, and rotating civil servants, officials, and employees throughout the RU.
- Job placement scheme: The RU must submit the job placement scheme to the MoET for approval. This scheme outlines the allocation and distribution of positions within the RU, ensuring effective and efficient personnel management.

These provisions grant the RU significant autonomy in managing its organizational and personnel affairs. By having the authority to make decisions related to personnel and organizational matters, the RU can shape its internal structure, define its human resources policies, and ensure the efficient functioning of the university. It is important to note that while the RU enjoys autonomy in these areas, there may still be some involvement and oversight from the MoET in certain aspects to ensure compliance with national regulations and standards.

Academic autonomy plays a crucial role in the RU system in Vietnam. The autonomy in this area encompasses several key aspects:

- New training programs: The RU is responsible for assessing and evaluating proposals for new training programs from member universities. Before submitting them to the MoET for approval, the RU conducts checks, confirms the conditions, and appraises the proposals. Furthermore, the RU actively participates in formulating, evaluating, and promulgating training programs, ensuring their alignment with the RU's educational objectives.
- Mode of enrollment: The RU exercises autonomy in determining the enrollment mode, granting them the flexibility to design and implement their admission processes. The RU takes on the

responsibility for managing the admission work of the university. Annually, they direct, guide, and consolidate the enrollment targets of each member unit, reporting them to the MoET. The RU also formulates regulations related to the management of training activities, providing a framework for effective enrollment procedures.

- Scientific and technological activities: The RU formulates and promulgates development strategies and annual plans for scientific and technological activities within the RU and its member units. This includes setting priorities, allocating resources, and fostering research and innovation initiatives. By exercising autonomy in this area, the RU can advance scientific and technological endeavors within the university system.
- International cooperation and quality assurance: The RU approves and oversees the implementation of the member unit's international cooperation strategies. They supervise the conditions for quality assurance and periodically conduct quality accreditation of joint training programs with foreign countries. This autonomy allows the RU to actively engage in international collaborations and ensure the quality and relevance of their joint programs.

The RU in Vietnam is granted *autonomy in finance and facilities, although to a lesser extent than the VNU model*. Here are the key points regarding autonomy in finance and facilities:

- Development investment: The RU receives focused development investment from the MoET due to the implementation of strategic tasks at the regional and national levels. A significant portion of the revenue comes from the state budget (according to the Three Publicly of the University of Danang, the state budget in 2017 accounted for 28.1%²). The universities are estimated as second-level units, receiving annual budget estimates from the MoET. They allocate and assign these estimates to their member HEIs and affiliated units based on the approved estimates by competent authorities.
- Financial autonomy and self-responsibility: The RU implements a regime of financial autonomy and self-responsibility within the scope of their regular funding sources according to the annual estimates. They have the authority to manage, guide, and inspect the use of financial resources by their affiliated units. Additionally, the RU actively mobilizes financial resources to supplement their budget.
- Joint management: Similar to the VNU model, the RU council jointly manages the member HEIs within the RU system. The RU bases its autonomy regulations on the guidelines provided by the MoET, taking into account each institution's specific characteristics and conditions. Although there are similarities in the areas of organization, personnel, academia, and finance, there are certain differences among member HEIs within the RU system. For instance, Thai Nguyen University delegates more authority to its member HEIs in various areas, while Da Nang University has relatively less decentralization.
- Degree of autonomy: While the degree of self-determination and self-responsibility may be lower than that of the VNU model, the RU system still exercises autonomy in important university activities, as granted by the MoET. However, similar to the VNU model, the RU has not achieved complete financial autonomy and continues to rely on government budget allocations for investment spending. As a result, they are subject to regulations from other ministries/departments and local authorities where the RU is located.

In summary, the RU system in Vietnam enjoys a certain level of autonomy in finance and facilities, although it may be less extensive than the VNU model. They have the authority to manage their financial resources, allocate budgets, and mobilize additional funds. However, their autonomy is constrained by the reliance on government funding and regulations from other ministries and localities.

The Model of Autonomy in Public Higher Education Institutions Has Piloted the Autonomy Mechanism (Pilot in Accordance to the 77/QD-CP Resolution)

The autonomy mechanism in public higher education institutions in Vietnam has been implemented through a pilot program under Resolution 77/QD-CP. As of 2019, 23 public HEIs in Vietnam have been granted autonomy under this resolution. These institutions have committed to self-guarantee their

operational and investment expenses, enabling them to exercise full autonomy and self-responsibility. Under this autonomy model, the HEIs have the right to make decisions and take responsibility in various key operational areas.

In terms of *organizational and personnel autonomy*, the establishment of the university council is directly decided and approved by the governing office. Pilot autonomous HEIs have the authority to make decisions regarding their attached units' establishment, merger, division, splitting, or dissolution, including determining their organization, functions, tasks, and operating regulations. They also have the power to decide on the structure and number of staff members and recruit managers, lecturers, and other workers. Furthermore, they can sign employment contracts and labor contracts and are even entitled to conclude labor contracts with foreign lecturers and scientists.

Regarding *academic autonomy*, pilot autonomous HEIs can decide whether to open branches or majors for training based on social needs. For branches and subjects not yet included in the State's list of training branches, they must report and seek permission from the MoET. They also have the power to determine enrollment quotas and establish partnerships with domestic and foreign training institutions based on accredited joint training programs. Additionally, they can make decisions regarding research directions and organize seminars with domestic and foreign organizations and individuals.

Autonomy in finance and facilities is a significant aspect for the pilot autonomous HEIs, the majority of the pilot autonomous HEIs do not receive funds from the state budget. These HEIs have the authority to determine average tuition fees and specific tuition rates within the prescribed range. They are also responsible for specifying and publicizing non-tuition revenues while ensuring cost recovery and reasonable accumulation. Additionally, they can decide how to use their revenues to cover operational expenses and establish funds at the prescribed rate. They can determine additional income for employees following internal spending regulations, in addition to the salaries prescribed by the State based on seniority and academic titles. Tuition fees and other non-business revenues are deposited in commercial banks. They can also make decisions regarding investment projects using the university's lawful revenue source and receive interest rate support policies from the Government for projects financed by loans.

Most of the pilot autonomous HEIs are prestigious universities and institutes in economics, technology, pharmacy, and foreign languages. These institutions often have high enrollment capacities and are known for providing high-quality training and international connections. They offer a wide range of educational services that meet the needs of society, making it easier for learners to accept payment for these services.

Survey results indicate that these HEIs have achieved a level of autonomy and self-responsibility in organizational structure, personnel, and academia comparable to the VNU. However, unlike the VNU, these institutions are not two-tier universities and no longer rely on the state budget for operational expenses and capital construction. As a result, they are less bound by the regulations of other ministries and departments.

After a period of implementing the autonomy policy, although relatively short, most of these HEIs have made significant achievements in organizational structure, quality of training activities, scientific research, international publications, financial management, expenses, equipment procurement, and facilities for training and scientific research. Overall, the socialization of education has been promoted. However, the implementation of the autonomy policy still faces various challenges and obstacles that need to be addressed.

The Autonomy Model for Public Higher Education Institutions Has Not Yet Been Universally Piloted

Apart from the VNU, RU, and pilot autonomy HEIs, other public HEIs under the MoET and various ministries, branches, socio-political organizations, and localities have either not been implemented or are ineligible to pilot the autonomy mechanism. A common characteristic among many of these HEIs is that they lack a long-established tradition and have been partially or primarily funded not by the State budget but directly by managing agencies such as ministries, industry-specific organizations, social organizations, economic groups, and localities.

Within this group, some institutions have achieved financial autonomy to cover both operational and capital expenses, while others have financial autonomy limited to operational expenses. Additionally, there are newly established institutions that have partial financial autonomy to cover recurrent spending.

The organization and operation of these HEIs comply with the Government's Decree No. 43/2006/ND-CP, which provides autonomy and self-responsibility for the performance of tasks, organizational structure, payroll, and finance for public non-business units. Based on the regulations and actual survey results at some of these HEIs, the authors can identify several features that characterize the autonomy level in key operation areas within this model.

In terms of *organizational and personnel autonomy*, the governing bodies determine and approve the university councils of these HEIs. HEIs have the authority to make decisions regarding the university's development goals, strategies, and plans. They can also decide on the establishment, division, dissolution, and merger of attached organizations in line with their assigned functions and tasks. Additionally, they are responsible for formulating personnel plans and recruiting staff, which require reporting to the responsible authorities for approval. HEIs can determine the recruitment methods for employees (who are considered state officials) and make decisions regarding appointments to public employee ranks. Furthermore, they can sign labor contracts with the recruited individuals and have the autonomy to enter into labor contracts with foreign lecturers and scientists.

In these HEIs, opening new training programs requires reporting and requesting approval from the managing agencies and the MoET. HEIs have the authority to decide on training programs' development, adjustment, evaluation, and approval. They also have the autonomy to formulate and approve the annual enrollment plan, which includes defining admission criteria and methods. The decisions related to training activities are submitted to the governing body and reported to the MoET.

Furthermore, HEIs exercise autonomy in ensuring learning outcomes and conducting quality accreditation. They can decide on joint training programs with domestic and foreign training institutions. HEIs also have the power to determine research directions and participate in scientific and technological tasks. They can utilize their assets and brands to engage in joint ventures or cooperation for conducting scientific and technological activities and providing public services.

Regarding *autonomy in finance and facilities*, many of these HEIs have not yet achieved self-sufficiency in funding for operational and investment expenses. A substantial portion of their total revenue still comes from the state budget. Data from the websites of these HEIs, such as Dong Thap University in 2017³, Quang Ninh Industrial University in 2016⁴, and Ho Chi Minh City University of Culture in 2018⁵, indicate that funding from the state budget accounted for a significant proportion (45.8%, 42.5%, and 48.3% respectively). Additionally, these HEIs are subject to regulations regarding tuition fees, non-business revenues, the usage of their revenue, and additional income for lecturers. They also need to make decisions on investment projects utilizing their own revenue and property purchases and invest in infrastructure from the non-business operation development fund, following approved planning by competent authorities.

Survey results reveal that these HEIs are under the direct management of localities and ministries outside the MoET, corporations, and social organizations. They often have a very limited level of self-determination, particularly in organizational structure, personnel, and finance. Many activities, including those related to academics, require permission and reporting from the MoET and the direct governing bodies. This indicates that if HEIs have less dependence on the governing body for appointing or dismissing leaders and possess higher financial autonomy, their autonomy in other areas tends to be higher.

However, the degree of autonomy may vary among different educational institutions. This distinction is more apparent in HEIs under ministries, social organizations, and localities, where they exhibit more autonomy in terms of leader appointments or dismissals and have reduced dependency on governing bodies for financial resources dedicated to recurrent spending.

Autonomy Model in Private Higher Education Institutions

Private HEIs encompass both non-profit and private institutions managed by the MoET and the People's Committee of the province/city where the HEI is located.

The organization and operation of these HEIs follow Decision No. 63/2011/QD-TTg issued by the Prime Minister, which amends and supplements certain articles of the Regulation on the organization and operation of private universities outlined in Decision No. 61/2009/QD-TTg. Drawing from government

regulations and field surveys conducted at these HEIs, we can generalize some key points about the autonomy model of HEIs based on their main activities.

In terms of *organizational and personnel autonomy*, the appointment of university councils, chair, and members of university councils, as well as president, is recognized and approved by the People's Committees of the respective provinces/cities where the universities are located. The appointment and dismissal of vice president rests with the council chair. Private HEIs have the authority to decide on the establishment, merger, division, splitting, or dissolution of facilities, as well as the functions and tasks of affiliated organizations. They can also determine the structure and number of staff, make decisions regarding the reception, appointment, job title changes, and promotions of employees, and have the right to enter into labor contracts with foreign lecturers and scientists.

In terms of academic autonomy, HEIs can decide on opening new training programs based on societal needs. They take responsibility for formulating, evaluating, and promulgating training programs, ensuring compliance with relevant requirements. HEIs can determine enrollment quotas and establish collaborative training programs based on accredited joint programs with domestic and foreign institutions. They also have the authority to decide research directions and organize scientific conferences in collaboration with domestic and foreign organizations and individuals.

Regarding *autonomy in finance and facilities*, private HEIs are responsible for financing regular and investment expenses. They can determine tuition fees that align with the quality of education provided. Private HEIs specify and publicize non-tuition revenues while ensuring cost recovery and reasonable accumulation. They can allocate revenues for regular activities and establish funds according to prescribed rates. Tuition fees and other non-business revenues are deposited in commercial banks. Private HEIs can make decisions regarding investment projects using lawful revenue sources and are actively involved in paying salaries, allowances, wages, bonuses, and contributions to employees' social insurance and health insurance. They are also responsible for reporting annual financial activities to the governing body and relevant local financial authorities.

The survey results highlighted that certain regulations constrain the autonomy and self-responsibility of activities in some private HEIs. One such regulation pertains to the proportion of revenues allocated to fund establishments like HEIs development funds and science and technology initiatives. This regulation limits their ability to actively engage in university activities. While private non-profit universities benefit from specific incentives based on certain criteria, their dependence on them often results in a loss of autonomy.

Overall, private HEIs have diligently adhered to the regulations on autonomy and self-responsibility set by the state. The variations in the exercise of self-determination among private HEIs in different areas of activity are minimal and depend on the management practices of the locality, economic establishments, or social organizations.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the right of decision making and self-responsibility according to three main contents of the five autonomy models of HEIs, ignoring the differences between HEIs in each model, we can come to some conclusions on the autonomy of these models as below:

By analyzing the decision-making rights and self-responsibility across the three main aspects of the five autonomy models of HEIs, we can draw some general conclusions regarding the autonomy of these models, disregarding the variations among HEIs within each model. The key findings are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
THE DEGREES OF FIVES TYPES OF HEIS AUTONOMY

Type of HEIs	Organizational & personnel autonomy	Academic Autonomy	Autonomy in Finance & facilities
VNU	Highest	Highest	High
RU	Highest	High	High
Pilot (77 / QD-CP)	Highest	Highest	Highest
Public	Low	Low	Low
Private	High	High	High

Firstly, it should be noted that each autonomy model in Vietnamese higher education institutions operates based on specific mechanisms in addition to the general provisions of Vietnamese HE. The VNU model stands out as the most advanced in autonomy and self-responsibility, particularly in the areas of organization, personnel, and academia. However, due to its heavy reliance on the state budget, there are still certain limitations in the financial sector, such as tuition fees and the utilization of revenue sources other than the state budget. Comparatively, while having less responsibility in organizational structure, personnel, academia, and finance, the RU model shares many similarities with the VNU model. This alignment is appropriate considering the faculty and financial capacities of the two groups of HEIs.

Secondly, although there are differences in operational mechanisms, autonomy levels, and factors such as science, technology, training, and social prestige, there is a common point between the autonomy model of public HEIs that have piloted the autonomy mechanism and the model of private HEIs: they are no longer dependent on the state budget for financial resources. Consequently, these two models are significantly influenced by market factors and must adapt to market mechanisms while complying with regulations. While there may be constraints imposed by ministries such as the MoET, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, as well as governing agencies and their relationships with sectors, organizations, economic groups, and localities, these models can be considered the closest and most accessible to full autonomy.

Lastly, the autonomy model of public HEIs that have not yet piloted the autonomy mechanism exhibits the highest dependency on state agencies and the lowest level of autonomy. The common mechanism within this group significantly reduces their autonomy and self-responsibility in all three areas of organizational structure, academia, and finance. The specific mechanisms imposed by each ministry, sector, social organization, group, or locality to which these institutions are affiliated reinforce their dependency. The reliance on the state budget for revenue, coupled with governing institutions and other regulations, greatly influences the decision-making authority of HEIs under this model.

ENDNOTES

1. <http://vnu.edu.vn/home/?C2575>
2. <http://www.udn.vn/app/webroot/upload/files/BM%2021.pdf>
3. <https://www.dthu.edu.vn/lists.aspx?p=125>
4. <http://qui.edu.vn/>
5. <http://www.hcmuc.edu.vn/ba-cong-khai/>

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