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Autonomy in Higher Education in Vietnam

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Abstract---Currently, the education and training in Vietnam sector has had specific policies and actions in which to attach importance to the renewal of the management mechanism for universities in the direction that universities are more and more autonomous in their mission implementation, improve the quality of education. International experience shows that one of the solutions to improve the quality of public universities is to gradually increase autonomy for universities in the following areas: autonomy in program and education plan; autonomy in using finance and facilities; autonomy in recruitment, human resource management; autonomy in educational goals and quality. The paper presents the research on the model of autonomous public universities in Vietnam in the context of the implementation of the Education Law 2019.

Keywords---accountability, autonomous universities, autonomy, high quality universities, higher education

Introduction

Autonomous universities are the product of the educational management model in the form of decentralization for universities (Honig, 2009; Scott & DiMartino, 2009). This model requires the decentralization, the participation of the majority in the decision-making process. This is a flexible management model based on the relationship between supply and demand in education. The World Bank's studies on more than 20 countries around the world in different continents in 2007 identified five levels of autonomous university performance. In which, the strongest degree of autonomy is that the councils, the representative boards of students' parents or departments of the university run all or almost all activities of the university (Netherlands) and the weakest level is that a system of public universities that are decentralized to the management of the province/city or region (including at least 2 provinces/cities), universities are obviously not allowed to transfer any rights to any decisions about education administration and program (Argentina, Chile) (The World Bank, 2007). According to another SABER case study (Systems Approach for Better Education Results - World Bank) on the model of autonomous universities (SAA - University Autonomy & Accountability), a university is autonomous when it comes to decision and accountability in 5 aspects (Saber (2015): (i) autonomy in planning and managing university budget, (ii) autonomy in human resource management, (iii) the role of university board in university governance (participation), (iv) evaluation of universities and students, (v) university responsibility (Figlio & Loeb, 2011; Merchant & Otley, 2006).

The content of autonomy in planning and management of the university budget includes the legal authority given to managing operating budgets, managing non-teaching staff salaries, managing teacher salaries, additional fundraising, planning and budgeting. The content of autonomy in personnel includes: autonomy in the appointment of teachers and the decision to assign tasks to teachers, autonomy in appointing and assigning tasks to employees, autonomy in appointing and assigning tasks to the principal of the university. The role of the University Council includes the following contents: participation of the university board in budget estimation, participation in financial supervision, participation in human resource management, participation in university activities, participation in the enrollment process and assessment of student input, ensuring transparency in the participation of the community. The content of autonomy in university and student assessment includes: using the Ministry of Education's criteria to evaluate according to regulations, using the assessment results to adjust the university's educational activities, publicizing student assessment results. In the SABER set of criteria, there are also criteria that emphasize the social

responsibility of the university, including: the responsibility to guide the use of students' assessment results, analysis of learning and student performance, and performance financial obligations at the central, local and grassroots levels (universities) and responsibilities in university operations and the level of university performance obligations (Saber, 2015).

Studies in Vietnam show the need to dig deeper into solutions to building an autonomous-oriented public university model in order to enforce the legal regulations on giving autonomy to universities, enhance the implementation guidance for university leaders in the organization of the university apparatus and operation. Inheriting international experiences, it is necessary to propose an autonomous university model with different levels, corresponding to the ability to ensure the quality of the university and suitable to the political - social - economic context of Vietnam. To meet those new directions, by theoretical research method, the research "Model of autonomous public universities to respond to educational innovation in Vietnam today" aims to propose a model of autonomous public universities with the objective of making university operations transparent; accelerating the process of democratization of educational activities, promoting the capacity of educators and educational administrators, expanding attendance, increasing consensus in universities, associating the university with the student's family, community and society (Nguyen Tai Hoa, 2019; Nguyen Tai Hoa, 2021).

Research Methods

Objectives of the study

From the perception and perspective of autonomy in universities in Vietnam, of the State policy and university governance, the research objective is to improve quality in universities and promote the transition from traditional models to autonomy in Vietnam (Trujillo, 2013; Russell et al., 2013; Kolleck & Yemini, 2019).

Methods

The research team conducted a survey from more than 25 universities including, including education experts, university teachers who are teaching at many universities in Vietnam. We used phone, email, Zalo – software to support interaction. In this study, the authors have found that the SWOT analysis model is a useful tool used to analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges in developing the quality of higher education in Vietnam. The SWOT model is specified as follows: SWOT stands for the first letters of the English words such as Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats.

- a. *Strengths*: Factors that are internal, within the organization and as an advantage, can be adjusted by the organization
- b. *Weaknesses*: The internal factors of the organization which are things that the organization has not done well or yet.
- c. *Opportunities*: External environmental factors that promote organizational development.
- d. *Threats*: External environmental factors have an obstructive effect, causing difficulties to the development of the organization.

Because of the advantages of the SWOT analysis model, the research team uses it for the analysis of quality issues in universities in Vietnam; however, the scope of the study will focus on the problem of autonomy in universities.

Analysis and interpretation

- a. Exploiting database of more than 25 universities in Vietnam combined with analysis of relevant legal institutions on higher education in Vietnam.
- b. From the SWOT analysis results, the research team discussed and analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, barriers and opportunities for the development of autonomous models in universities in Vietnam. .
- c. From there, the research team proposes the contents to be implemented to develop the model of autonomy in universities effectively.

Research result

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats on the problem of developing an autonomous model in universities Higher education program in Vietnam for the period 2015-2020

Based on the historical approach, the model of autonomous universities is proposed on the basis of the analysis from the context of educational innovation, the effects of the policy of the higher education reform program on the activities of the university. Firstly, on the education reform strategy, Resolution 29 of the 8th Party Central Committee emphasized the policy “Continue to strongly and synchronously innovate the basic elements of education and training in the direction of attaching importance to quality and capacity development of learners” and “complete the higher education program after 2015”. In the implementation of the higher education program, universities are more empowered to develop university programs: “Based on the content and requirements of the higher education program universities built individual education plans for their universities which are flexible, suitable to specific local conditions and circumstances, and ensure the educational goals and quality”. This is an important basis for the university to exercise autonomy in directing educational activities, developing the university program in accordance with the characteristics of students and local conditions. In addition, the resolution mentioned a system of solutions to implement educational innovation, in which the solution of educational management innovation is considered as a key solution: “Renovating fundamentally education and training management, ensuring democracy and unity; increasing autonomy and social responsibility of education and training institutions; attaching great importance to quality management”. Specifically, the mechanism for enhancing autonomy for educational institutions starts from clearly defining the responsibilities of the state management agencies for education and training and the management responsibilities by sectors and territories of the ministries, sectors, localities, to delineate the work of state management from the governance of educational and training institutions, promote decentralization, improve accountability, create motivation and initiative and creativity of institutions educations. This is a mechanism for creating synchronous coordination to give autonomy and self-responsibility to education and training institutions, promote the role of the university council (the council). At the same time, the solution focuses on ensuring the social responsibility of educational institutions through the supervision of the subjects in the university and the society, strengthening the inspection and inspection of the management authorities at all levels. Democracy, publicity and transparency are also proposed to ensure effective autonomy (Giang et al., 2022; Maba et al., 2018).

Research on institutions

Autonomy of public universities has been specified in current legal documents, especially in the Education Law 2019. In this law regarding the university's duties and powers, the performance of tasks, organizational structure, personnel and finance of educational institutions are prescribed as follows: “Preuniversity institutions, higher education institutions implement the democratic regulations in the university, have accountability to the society, learners, management agencies, ensure the participation of learners, families and society in university management”. Specifically, the Law also stipulates the content of state management for higher education institutions (including public universities) in Article 52, stipulates the content of autonomy in the organization and activities associated with the management subjects in the university in Articles 56, 57, 58, 59 and 60. Regarding the content of autonomy in human resource management, the education law stipulates that: “The university actively proposes needs, participates in recruiting teachers and workers in public universities, manage and use teachers, employees, and student”. Regarding the content of financial autonomy, the Law affirms: “Universities are allowed to mobilize, manage and use resources in accordance with the law, build facilities according to standardization and modernization requirements”.

Regarding the management of educational activities, the university is entitled to “Organize enrollment, education, training, scientific research, transfer of training results and scientific research in accordance with its functions, duties and rights; certify or issue diplomas and certificates according to its competence”. In addition to the granted autonomy, in Vietnam, the Education Law also affirms the responsibilities of the university: “Publicly announcing the educational objectives, programs and plans, educational quality assurance conditions, and evaluation results and educational quality accreditation, diploma and certificate system of the university”. The Education Law lays an important legal foundation from which to promulgate the documents under the law to guide the implementation of autonomy and self-responsibility of educational institutions. Current legal documents (such as: Decree 16/2015 / ND-CP dated February 14, 2015 providing autonomy and self-responsibility in performing tasks, organizational structure, payroll and financial capacity for public non-business units; Circular 03/2016/TT-BNV guiding the establishment and operation of management boards in public non-business units; Circular 58/2011/TT-BGDDT

promulgates the regulations assessment of junior university and university students) mentioned the autonomous framework of public education institutions in the following contents: autonomy in organization, personnel management, financial management, educational activities, the role of actors (the State governance agencies, Party Committee/ University Party Committee, University Council, University Board), university responsibility and autonomy of teachers and students. In general, although the regulations exist and show the spirit of unity, they are not yet focused. This raises the requirement to improve the legal basis for implementing autonomy for public universities (Van Dinther et al., 2011; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016).

International experience

SABER SAA proposed 5 policy solutions: (1) increase autonomy in budget estimation and management of the university, (2) increase autonomy in human resource management, (3) enhance the role of the university board in regulating university activities, (4) strengthen university assessment and teacher evaluation, and (5) strengthen the stakeholder's accountability. The model of university-based governance is a proposal based on the argument that instead of the long-term impact of government policy, there is a need for a more immediate, decentralized and educational institutions to make decisions more quickly and promptly respond to the demands of social contexts. The reason for these major power-shifting solutions is that the university, as a provider, will be directly influenced by its customers - including students, student parents and social community (client), who enjoy educational products from the university. Universities need more decision-making power to tailor activities to the needs of learners, parents and social communities [8]. However, SABER said that only increasing autonomy is not enough, it is necessary to strengthen university assessment, teacher assessment and increase accountability of the university. Accordingly, the criteria framework for assessing the autonomy of universities according to the AAA model of university-based management (SABER SAA) has proposed the content of autonomy under the model of Autonomy, Assessment, and Accountability (AAA). This model is illustrated in Figure 1.

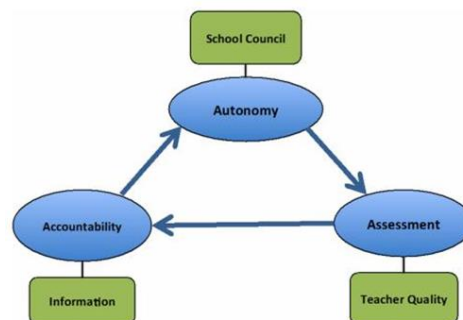


Figure 1. Closed Circle Autonomy, Assessment, and Accountability
Source: SABER World Bank

However, there are a few issues that need to be raised with the SABER SAA model: over-emphasis on student performance assessments can increase the pressure and burden of responsibility for teacher. In addition, the university will focus more on solutions to increase students' scores (internal short-term efficiency) rather than long-term quality (external long-term effectiveness). Thus, comparing the legal framework of autonomous universities in Vietnam and some international models, it can be seen that the autonomy framework of Vietnamese universities has begun to approach those recommended in the world, emphasizing on the contents: autonomy in financial management, autonomy in personnel management, the role of the university board and autonomy in organizing educational activities (models in the world emphasize specially on the student assessment process). The university autonomy model is also always associated with accountability. However, the connotation of each autonomous field of international models emphasizes a number of key areas, ensuring the synchronous efficiency of university governance activities in the direction of autonomy. Research results from international models will be important recommendations in building Vietnam's autonomous university model to meet requirements as close to international standards and in accordance with the domestic socio-political context (Kember, 1997; Olcay & Bulu, 2017).

Discussion

Proposing a model of an autonomous public university

The model of an autonomous public university is a theoretical educational model, described by a number of key factors such as: the decentralized relationship in university management (including relationship between state management agencies with the universities, between the subjects participating in the management of the universities), the roles and functions of each subject, the elemental framework of autonomy of the public universities (autonomy - responsibility - quality assurance). From the research results and international experience, it is possible to propose a model of an autonomous public university with structured elements as follows:

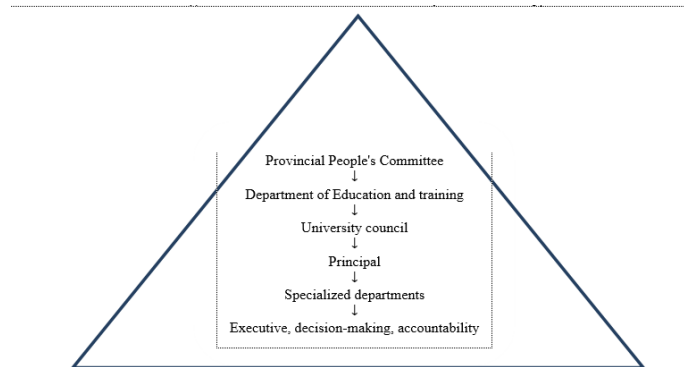


Figure 2. The model of an autonomous public university

To operate the model of an autonomous public university, it is necessary to clearly define the role of state management for educational institutions and clearly define the functions and tasks of the subjects participating in the university leadership and management, at the same time clearly define the autonomy of teachers and learners as personal autonomy - closely related to the autonomy of the organization. The role of state management and the role of the subjects in the university is proposed as follows basing on the research and collection of current legal regulations and some adjustment recommendations on the basis of theoretical and practical research on university management:

The role of state management agencies

The role of state management agencies is shown in the following contents: establishment and organization management, human resource management, financial management and educational activities management. Regarding the authority to establish and organize, Provincial People's Committees have the authority to establish or permit the establishment of universities, merge or split, dissolve universities; the Department of Education and Training has the authority to permit educational activities, and rearrange public universities in accordance with local practical conditions. Regarding personnel management, the Provincial People's Committee approves the total number of employees of public universities; ensure the full staff of educational administrators, ensure a sufficient number of people working under the approved job position project, meet the conditions to ensure the quality of education for public universities; direct the implementation of the use, evaluation, training, fostering and implementation of policies for the contingent of civil servants, public employees and employees at public universities. Regarding financial management, the Provincial People's Committee has the authority to prescribe a roadmap for calculating sufficient prices and fees for public universities to ensure relative policy support; to promulgate mechanisms and policies to encourage the socialization of educational activities. The Provincial People's Committee submits to the People's Council of the province to decide the annual tuition fee for public universities. The Provincial People's Committee correctly and adequately allocates the state budget to spend on local education according to regulations on management and inspection of the use of the state budget, collection and use of tuition fees and other legal revenues with public universities. Regarding the management of educational activities, the Provincial People's Committee prescribes the education quality criteria and standards, mechanisms for supervision, evaluation, and accreditation of education quality, performance of public universities, inspection, examination, and sanctioning of violations in educational activities. Department of Education and Training submits to the Provincial People's

Committee for decision: (i) to guide, organize the implementation of professional work; build national standard universities; enroll, do examination, grant and withdraw diplomas and certificates, and accreditate education quality for public universities. (ii) To allow educational activities, suspend educational activities for public universities (Dickinson, 1995; Najeeb, 2013).

The role of entities participating in university leadership and management

In order to operate the model of autonomous universities, it is necessary to clearly define the roles of subjects participating in university leadership and management. These roles are associated with the implementation of each area of autonomy to avoid overlapping in the direction and administration of the university's activities. The Party is represented by the head of the Party organization in a public university (the university's Party Committee secretary) that leads the university within the framework of the Constitution and the law (Shipps & White 2009). Principal is the person responsible for the management and administration of university activities. Principals are competent to build and organize the university's apparatus through proposing plans to arrange and consolidate the university's organizational structure and submit it to competent authorities for decision. Principals may decide to establish, reorganize, or dissolve units that are not part of the organizational structure of constituent units under the decision of the authority. In a role relationship with the university Council, the principal implements the resolutions of the university Council, builds the university development plan, university year plan and tasks and direct to implement plan, reports and evaluates the performance results to the university council and competent authorities, implements policies for teachers and students, implements democratic regulations, mobilizes and coordinates social resources to improve the quality of education of the university, to meet the needs of the people. The University Council headed by the Chairman of University Council decides on the university's mid-term and annual development goals, strategies and plans, adopts regulations on the organization and operation of the university to submit to authorities for approval, decides on the policy of building organizational apparatus, recruiting, training and retraining civil servants, public employees and employees, finance, assets, investment in the construction of facilities, procurement of equipment, and mobilization of necessary resources for the development of the university's operations, decides on the professional, professional operation orientation and science and technology development orientation of the university, supervises the implementation of the University Council's resolutions, the implementation of the democratic regulations in the university activities. In addition, the university council has the authority to propose the Provincial People's Committee to appoint, dismiss, reward, discipline and provide policies for principals and vice principals; periodically or irregularly report to superior management agencies on university activities; periodically or unexpectedly request the head of the public university to report on the university's activities; approve the establishment, reorganization and dissolution of the university's constituent units; approve the scheme to determine the employment position of the university before submitting it to the competent authority for appraisal; approve the financial plan, the fees of professional activities, basic criteria in professional activities, operations and annual financial settlement reports of public non-business units (Eberle & Hobrecht, 2021; Bayuo et al., 2020).

Conclusions

The study has proposed the model of an autonomous public university and the operating mechanism of the model on the basis of analyzing domestic and international contexts, generalizing theoretical current models and systematizing legal documents. To implement the model in practice, the study proposes the following recommendations:

- a. For the Ministry of Education and Training: soon issue a circular guiding the implementation of autonomy and accountability of public universities (including universities) on the basis of unified legal documents in which specifies the authority of state management agencies in the implementation of autonomy of universities, determines the domains of autonomy and assigned levels of autonomy corresponding to the ability to ensure the quality of education of the university, specifies the authority of subjects participating in university management and administration. In particular, the regulation on the degree of autonomy of universities should have a close correlation with the ability to ensure the quality of education of the university. The autonomy may be given to establishments that have met the quality standard by degrees. After the process of empowering autonomy, it is necessary to have a strict monitoring mechanism with legal tools to ensure effective implementation of autonomy.
- b. The education sector should have training courses to improve autonomy capacity for universities with the contents of: legal basis, organizational strategies, human resource management, financial management, management of professional activities aimed at exercising autonomy to the extent that it allows.

- c. The local state management agencies in education need to have development strategies, projects ... in order to create favorable conditions for universities to develop their capacity and be proactive in educational activities.
- d. It is necessary to soon establish a professional association for teachers to enhance the ability to exchange, learn and support each other, create a learning community that regularly develops professional expertise for teachers, contributing to practice effective autonomy. The issues posed for the following studies: need to clarify more clearly the fields and degree of autonomy of public universities. The degree of autonomy will correspond to the level of quality assurance of the university's education. The autonomous contents will focus on key areas of the university as recommended by international organizations and in accordance with current legal regulations.

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