



## Research on Autonomy and Accountability of High Schools in Vietnam



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### Abstract

Currently, the education and training in the Vietnam sector have had specific policies and actions in which to attach importance to the renewal of the management mechanism for high schools in the direction that schools 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 high schools is to gradually increase autonomy for schools 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 high schools in Vietnam in the context of the implementation of the Education Law 2019 and the 2018 high school program.

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## 1 Introduction

Autonomous schools are the product of the educational management model in the form of decentralization for schools (Honig, 2009; Scott & DiMartino, 2009). This model requires 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 school performance. In which, the strongest degree of autonomy is that the councils, the representative boards of students' parents or departments of the school run all or almost all activities of the school (Netherlands), and the weakest level is that a system of public schools that are decentralized to the management of the province/city or region (including at least 2 provinces/cities), schools are 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 schools (SAA - School Autonomy & Accountability), a school is autonomous when it comes to decision and accountability in 5 aspects (Demas & Arcia, 2015): (i) autonomy in planning and managing school budget, (ii) autonomy in human resource management, (iii) the role of the school board in school governance (participation), (iv) evaluation of schools and students, (v) school responsibility.

The content of autonomy in planning and management of the school 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 school (Hopkins & Stern, 1996; Dainty et al., 2018). The role of the School Council includes the following contents: participation of the school board in budget estimation, participation in financial supervision, participation in human resource management, participation in school activities, participation in the enrollment process and assessment of student input, ensuring transparency in the participation of the community. The content of autonomy in school and student assessment includes: using the Ministry of Education's criteria to evaluate according to regulations, using the assessment results to adjust the school's educational activities, publicizing student assessment results. In the SABER set of criteria, some criteria emphasize the social responsibility of the school, 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 (schools) and responsibilities in school operations and the level of school performance obligations (Demas & Arcia, 2015).

Studies in Vietnam show the need to dig deeper into solutions to building an autonomous-oriented public school model to enforce the legal regulations on giving autonomy to schools. , enhance the implementation guidance for school leaders in the organization of the school apparatus and operation. Inheriting international experiences, it is necessary to propose an autonomous school model with different levels, corresponding to the ability to ensure the quality of the school 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 schools to respond to educational innovation in Vietnam today" aims to propose a model of autonomous public high schools to make school operations transparent; accelerating the process of democratization of educational activities, promoting the capacity of educators and educational administrators, expanding attendance, increasing consensus in schools, associating the school with the student's family, community and society (Bracci, 2009; Figlio & Loeb, 2011).

## 2 Materials and Methods

### *Objectives of the study*

From the perception and perspective of autonomy in high schools in Vietnam, of the State policy and high school governance, the research objective is to improve quality in high schools and promote the transition from traditional models to autonomy in Vietnam.

### *Methods*

The research team conducted a survey from more than 25 high schools including (high schools and junior high schools), including education experts, high school teachers who are teaching at many schools 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 general 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.

- Strengths: Internal Factors, within the organization and as an advantage, can be adjusted by the organization
- Weaknesses: The internal factors of the organization are things that the organization has not done well or yet.
- Opportunities: External environmental factors that promote organizational development.
- 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 schools in Vietnam; however, the scope of the study will focus on the problem of autonomy in high schools.

### *Analysis and interpretation*

- Exploiting database of more than 25 schools in Vietnam combined with analysis of relevant legal institutions on general education in Vietnam.
- From the SWOT analysis results, the research team discussed and analyzed the strengths, weaknesses, barriers, and opportunities for the development of autonomous models in schools in Vietnam.

From there, the research team proposes the contents to be implemented to develop the model of autonomy in high schools effectively.

## **3 Research Result**

### *Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats on the problem of developing an autonomous model in high schools*

#### *The general education program in Vietnam for the period 2015-2020*

Based on the historical approach, the model of autonomous high schools is proposed based on the analysis from the context of educational innovation, the effects of the policy of the general education reform program on the activities of the school. 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 general education program after 2015”.

From those general directions, in 2018, the 2018 general education program was issued together with Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT dated December 26, 2018, of the Minister of Education and Training. In the implementation of the general education program, schools are more empowered to develop school programs: “Based on the content and requirements of the general education program schools built individual education plans for their schools which are flexible, suitable to specific local conditions and circumstances, and ensure the educational goals and quality”.

This is an important basis for the school to exercise autonomy in directing educational activities, developing the school program by the characteristics of students and local conditions (Mausethagen, 2013; Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). 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 education 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 school 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 school 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 (Kim, 2018; Laka & Suprasto, 2020; Meza et al., 2018).

#### *Research on institutions*

The autonomy of public high schools has been specified in current legal documents, especially in the Education Law 2019. In Clauses 2 and 3, Article 60 of this Law regarding the school's duties and powers, the performance of tasks, organizational structure, personnel, and finance of educational institutions are prescribed as follows: "Preschool institutions, general education institutions implement the democratic regulations in the school, have accountability to the society, learners, management agencies, ensure the participation of learners, families, and society in school management". Specifically, the Law also stipulates the content of state management for general education institutions (including public high schools) in Article 52, stipulates the content of autonomy in the organization and activities associated with the management subjects in the school in Articles 56, 57, 58, 59 and 60. Regarding the content of autonomy in human resource management, the education law stipulates that: "The school actively proposes needs, participates in recruiting teachers and workers in public schools, manage and use teachers, employees, and student". Regarding the content of financial autonomy, the Law affirms: "Schools are allowed to mobilize, manage and use resources by the law, build facilities according to standardization and modernization requirements". Regarding the management of educational activities, the school is entitled to "Organize enrollment, education, training, scientific research, transfer of training results and scientific research by 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 school: "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 school". 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 12/2011/ TT-BGDDT promulgating the charter of high schools; Circular 03/2016/TT-BNV guiding the establishment and operation of management boards in public non-business units; Circular 32/2018/TT-BGDDT promulgating the general education program; Circular 18/2018/TT-BGDDT providing for education quality accreditation and recognition of national standards for junior high schools, high schools and high schools with multiple levels of education; Circular 14/2018/TT-BGDDT promulgates the standard regulations for principals of general education institutions; Circular 58/2011/TT-BGDDT promulgates the regulations assessment of junior high school and high school students) mentioned the autonomous framework of public general 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/ School Party Committee, School Council, School Board), school 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 high schools (Katyal & Evers, 2004; Contento et al., 2010).

#### *International experience*

SABER SAA proposed 5 policy solutions: (1) increase autonomy in budget estimation and management of the school, (2) increase autonomy in human resource management, (3) enhance the role of the school board in regulating school activities, (4) strengthen school assessment and teacher evaluation, and (5) strengthen the stakeholder's accountability. The model of school-based governance is a proposal based on the argument that instead of the long-

term impact of government policy, there is a need for 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 school, as a provider, will be directly influenced by its customers - including students, student parents, and the social community (client), who enjoy educational products from the school. Schools 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 school assessment, teacher assessment and increases accountability of the school. Accordingly, the criteria framework for assessing the autonomy of schools according to the AAA model of school-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.

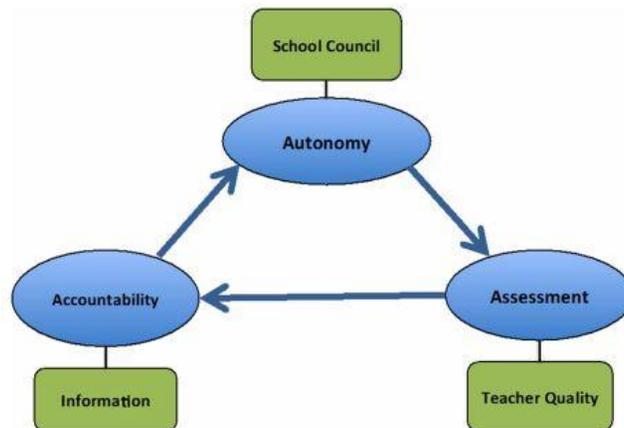


Figure 1. Closed circle autonomy, assessment, and accountability (Source: SABER World Bank)

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 the teacher. In addition, the school 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 schools in Vietnam and some international models, it can be seen that the autonomy framework of Vietnamese schools has begun to approach those recommended in the world, emphasizing the contents: autonomy in financial management, autonomy in personnel management, the role of the school board and autonomy in organizing educational activities (models in the world emphasize especially on the student assessment process). The school autonomy model is also always associated with accountability (Kolleck & Yemini, 2019; Fan & Liang, 2020). However, the connotation of each autonomous field of international models emphasizes several key areas, ensuring the synchronous efficiency of school governance activities in the direction of autonomy. Research results from international models will be important recommendations in building Vietnam's autonomous school model to meet requirements as close to international standards and by the domestic socio-political context.

## 4 Discussion

### *Proposing a model of an autonomous public high school*

The model of an autonomous public high school is a theoretical educational model, described by several key factors such as the decentralized relationship in school management (including the relationship between state management agencies with the high schools, between the subjects participating in the management of the high schools), the roles and functions of each subject, the elemental framework of autonomy of the public high schools (autonomy - responsibility - quality assurance).

From the research results and international experience, it is possible to propose a model of an autonomous public high school with structured elements as follows:

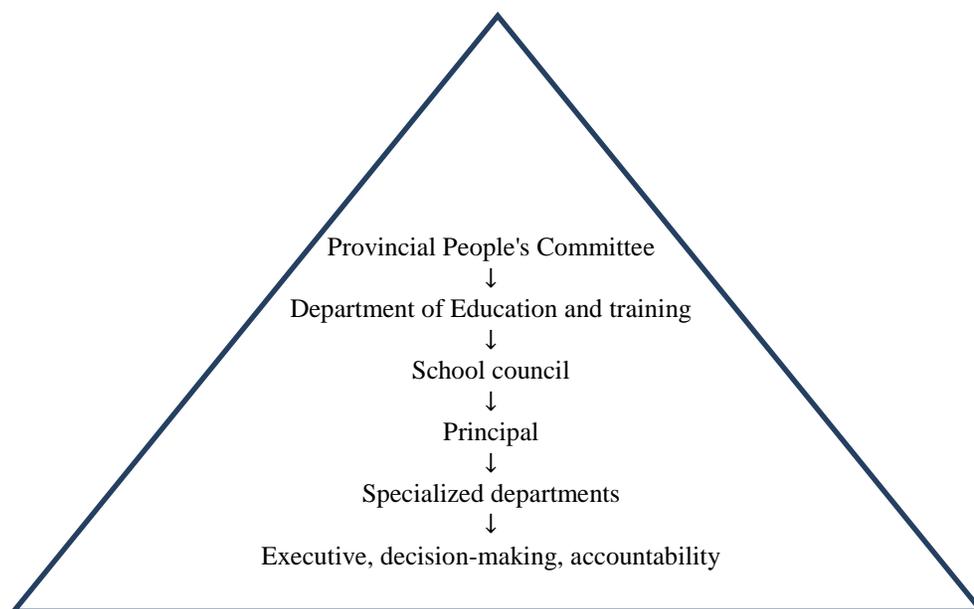


Figure 2. The model of an autonomous public high school

To operate the model of an autonomous public high school, 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 school leadership and management, at the same time 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 school is proposed as follows based on the research and collection of current legal regulations and some adjustment recommendations based on theoretical and practical research on school 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 schools, merge or split, dissolve high schools; the Department of Education and Training has the authority to permit educational activities, and rearrange public high schools by local practical conditions. Regarding personnel management, the Provincial People's Committee approves the total number of employees of public high schools; 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 high schools; 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 high schools. Regarding financial management, the Provincial People's Committee has the authority to prescribe a roadmap for calculating sufficient prices and fees for public high schools to ensure relative policy support; to promulgate mechanisms and policies to encourage the socialization of educational activities (Trujillo, 2013; Russell et al., 2013). The Provincial People's Committee submits to the People's Council of the province to decide the annual tuition fee for public high schools. 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 high schools. 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, the performance of public high schools, 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 schools; enroll, do examination, grant and withdraw diplomas and certificates, and accreditation education quality for public high schools. (ii) To allow educational activities, suspend educational activities for public high schools.

### *The role of entities participating in school leadership and management*

To operate the model of autonomous schools, it is necessary to clearly define the roles of subjects participating in school 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 school's activities. The Party is represented by the head of the Party organization in a public high school (the school's Party Committee secretary) that leads the school within the framework of the Constitution and the law (Shipps & White 2009). The principal is the person responsible for the management and administration of school activities. Principals are competent to build and organize the school's apparatus through proposing plans to arrange and consolidate the school'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 school Council, the principal implements the resolutions of the school Council, builds the school development plan, school year plan, and tasks, and direct to implement the plan, reports and evaluates the performance results to the school 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 school, to meet the needs of the people. The School Council headed by the Chairman of School Council decides on the school's mid-term and annual development goals, strategies, and plans, adopts regulations on the organization and operation of the school 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 school's operations, decides on the professional, professional operation orientation and science and technology development orientation of the school, supervises the implementation of the School Council's resolutions, the implementation of the democratic regulations in the school activities. In addition, the school 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 school activities; periodically or unexpectedly request the head of the public high school to report on the school's activities; approve the establishment, reorganization and dissolution of the school's constituent units; approve the scheme to determine the employment position of the high school before submitting it to the competent authority for the 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.

## **5 Conclusion**

The study has proposed the model of an autonomous public high school and the operating mechanism of the model based on 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:

- For the Ministry of Education and Training: soon issue a circular guiding the implementation of autonomy and accountability of public schools (including high schools) based on unified legal documents in which specifies the authority of state management agencies in the implementation of autonomy of schools, determines the domains of autonomy and assigned levels of autonomy corresponding to the ability to ensure the quality of education of the school, specifies the authority of subjects participating in school management and administration. In particular, the regulation on the degree of autonomy of schools should have a close correlation with the ability to ensure the quality of education of the school. 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 the effective implementation of autonomy.

- The education sector should have training courses to improve autonomy capacity for schools with the contents of the legal basis, organizational strategies, human resource management, financial management, management of professional activities aimed at exercising autonomy to the extent that it allows.
- The local state management agencies in education need to have developed strategies, projects to create favorable conditions for high schools to develop their capacity and be proactive in educational activities.
- 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, contribute to practice effective autonomy. The issues posed for the following studies: need to clarify more clearly the fields and degree of autonomy of public high schools. The degree of autonomy will correspond to the level of quality assurance of the school's education. The autonomous contents will focus on key areas of the school as recommended by international organizations and by current legal regulations.

*Conflict of interest statement*

The authors declared that's he have no competing interest.

*Statement of authorship*

The authors have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The authors have approved the final article.

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