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Current status and solutions for innovation in university governance in the context of Vietnamese education

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Abstract

Governance in higher education institutions means establishing and maintaining an environment in which individuals working together in groups can function effectively and productively utilize all resources, to accomplish the set goals. Therefore, higher education institutions need to pay particular attention to building missions, vision, strategies, and goals in their administration and operating. Much attention needs to be paid to organize an effective administration, financial issues, management mechanisms, controlling operations and effectively allocating and using resources. New "products" created in universities throughout training and research can fulfill the market needs. In this article, the author presents an overview of university governance; clarifies a number of issues about university governance, the current status of university governance mechanisms and guiding documents related to university governance... From there, the article offers "some solutions" to innovate university administration in Vietnam today, in order to improve the quality of higher education in the present and the future.

Keywords: Mechanism; Higher education; university governance; Innovation of university governance

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization and the 4.0 industrial revolution, the higher education system in Vietnam is facing many new challenges and opportunities. Innovation in governance at higher education institutions is to improve the quality and effectiveness of training, ensuring social equity on the basis of promoting autonomy and accountability of higher education institutions. To do so, a systematic approach is needed to synchronously address the operational mechanisms of the institution related to three main aspects of work: governance capacity, quality assurance and accountability (Do Duc Minh, 2018). University governance not only affects the quality of education but also shapes the competitiveness of educational institutions domestically and internationally. Currently, many universities in Vietnam are making efforts to implement effective governance strategies to improve the quality of education, improve training programs, and meet the needs of the labor market. However, there are still many shortcomings in the governance process, as well as in building a learning and research environment. Higher education institutions need to pay special attention to building missions, visions and strategies, goals in governance and operation of the unit. It is necessary to focus on the issue of organizing an effective management apparatus, financial issues, mechanisms for governance, control of operations and the issue of effective use and allocation of resources. New "products" created in universities through the training and research process need to meet market needs (Dobbins, M., 2017b, c).

The change of university governance in the current context is necessary, universities in Vietnam need to innovate in organizational models, innovate in school governance. The article provides some general assessments of university governance and proposes some recommendations on innovation of this work in Vietnam.

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2. Research results

2.1. Overview of the research problem

Currently, common trends in higher education include: comprehensive and diverse education, promoting research and development capacity Higher education as a small business model (Hong, 2018). The degree of dependence of university governance on management agencies will vary depending on the following groups of factors: (1) political institutions; (2) socio-cultural; (3) development orientation of the university governance group; and (4) financial resources.

Shattock's (2017) meta-analysis of Commonwealth universities from the early 20th century to 2016 sheds more light on trends in university governance. The common feature of universities here is the multi-party governance including disciplinary councils, university councils, academic councils, and heads of faculties and departments. However, the influence of university councils began to decline with the emergence of representatives of state agencies and students in university operations. The problems of inflation, fraud and instability in the financial allocation system at universities in the group of countries in the Commonwealth of Nations in the 1970s of the 20th century forced these countries to change the way they governed their universities and the emergence of university corporations (Higher Education corporations - HECs), established by science and technology universities in 1988 (Shattock, 2017; Sizer, 1987). Accordingly, these universities will operate like a company with the elimination of the development direction of the scientific council. This right is given to the executive director and the board of directors of the corporation. The marketization of the financial mechanism has promoted the governance capacity of the university board through risk management, access and analysis of the education market, and at the same time, searching for and seizing potential opportunities through these activities. Therefore, operating a university as a corporate corporation has brought many benefits to universities in the UK in terms of finance and development of management capacity.

In addition, Dobbins (2017b) analyzed the formation process of the education system in Poland and Romania. Both of these education systems originated from education under strong government management and administration before moving to an autonomous model in both system operation and finance. Dobbins's research divided university governance into three branches called ideal methods, including: the state-centered model, the academic self-governance model, and the marketized model.

In the first model, universities will be operated in the "public university" method with the lowest level of autonomy and the Government will participate in the operation of the university in all aspects. For the form of "Self-governing Academy" or "semi-autonomous university", universities in this group will be operated according to the Humboldt System (Humboldt is a Prussian Educational Reformer and Linguist, full name is Wilhelm Von Humboldt) and are free to pursue branches of teaching and academic research in accordance with the aspirations of the academy. However, universities are still subject to the management of development plans and financial payment rules of the Government.

The pressure from financial dependence under the control of the Government has formed the model of "commercialized university" and is widely applied to university governance in countries in Dobbins's comprehensive study. In this model, universities will "operate like a business" to serve the needs of the region, the field in which the university operates as well as the needs of the world. It should be noted that, in these universities, the Government will not completely stop paying for universities but will partially support the operation of universities (Dobbins, 2017a, b).

Unlike the West, Confucianism is considered a foundation for building an "educational model" in the East (with China as a typical representative), at the same time putting the criterion of "Respecting teachers and valuing education" at the forefront and creating a distinct mark between the two educational systems (Lin et al., 2020; Marginson, 2011). However, Confucian culture has a major weakness: the education hierarchy system is too clear, limiting freedom in academics and university governance. As an inevitable consequence, the restriction of the development of higher education in countries belonging to the Eastern group of countries is common. Philip (2016) clarified this point and pointed out that the problem with universities in China lies in the stratification of higher education, by pointing out the gap in financial support from the Government between a small group of top universities and a large number of small universities in many different regions here.

However, many scholars have demonstrated that the process of university governance and the development of education in general cannot be separated from the close connection with the orientation of the Government in general and the socio-economic situation in particular (Lin et al., 2020; Rungfamai, 2018; Song, 2020).

In fact, China has had great achievements in economic, political, social, and educational development. Hong (2018) pointed out the main features of university governance in China when comparing Chinese and Australian education

systems on three aspects of university governance, including: The relationship between universities and the Government; The regulatory relationship within university governance; Finance in university operations. The development and popularization of higher education has promoted research and development of regulations on quality assurance, efficiency improvement and development of operating capital in the higher education system here. In the 1970s, the Chinese government granted semi-autonomy, privatization, and marketization with a policy of freely seeking capital from private investors. However, the overall control of universities here still depends largely on the decisions of the government (Hong, 2018). As a result, the government has promoted the competitiveness and development of universities here after adopting the policy of marketization and privatization as an enterprise in the university governance model (Hong, 2018; Mok, 2005). However, the centralization of decision-making power in the issue of university operating funding in China still brings many major consequences. There, the gap in funding between large universities and less prestigious universities is very large, which leads to limitations in the overall development ability of small universities in general and creates bias towards famous domestic universities (Lin et al., 2020). Practical experience of countries around the world and research works show that, after universities receive autonomy from the State management agency, universities tend to operate independently according to the operating mechanism similar to a private sector enterprise because of the benefits it brings in both academic and administrative-financial aspects.

Research by Flórez-Parra et al. (2019) at universities in Colombia has demonstrated that operating universities as a business also demonstrates more transparency in university governance, especially in work related to the orientation and development of universities.

The results of research works in Vietnam by previous authors related to the research problem are presented below.

Governance is important and is considered a decisive factor in creating the success of the organization. Good governance is the creation of a system of institutions and principles of good governance for the organization, including the structure and coordination of different resources to achieve the strategic development goals of the organization. This becomes even clearer and especially important for universities, where the characteristic capital is human resources with a higher proportion of high-quality human resources than the general average of society, along with the most important products being knowledge and new technology.

University governance (generally called university governance) is a system established and implemented in universities in accordance with contemporary socio-economic development. University governance is based on principles and practices aimed at the university fulfilling its mission and continuously improving all aspects of its operations to best meet the requirements of stakeholders. These governance principles can be process-based or output-based with specific criteria so that stakeholders can monitor university activities. On the other hand, university governance also needs to comply with mandatory principles issued by state management agencies or ownership agencies to ensure transparency and fairness in management and operations (Dinh Van Toan, 2019c). Therefore, one of the important issues affecting the level of university governance in Vietnam today is finding a suitable governance mechanism.

A good university governance system will stimulate and encourage the development of good things, creating intellectual capital - the secret or competitive advantage of a university in today's world. On the contrary, it will corrupt the values of the university and destroy the university environment. According to many scholars, in addition to the central activities (such as teaching, learning, training programs, learning outcomes, testing and evaluation...), the supporting factors that contribute to the success of a university are: university leadership and governance (Ngo Tuyet Mai, 2012). The practical activities of universities, and some summaries of researchers show that the most common characteristics of a successful university at the national and international level are: focusing on capacity; rich resources and favorable governance. It can be affirmed that the role of university governance is decisive for the fate of a university. Regarding the university model, many summaries from studies point out three main trends in the organization and management of universities through the stages (which can also be considered as models of university organization and governance). Those models are: Administrative organization; Organization of a community of scholars and the "corporate university" organizational model.... Each model is associated with different characteristics in terms of organization and management style of the university (Dinh Van Toan, 2020, 2019a, b, c).

The model of a university as an administrative organization (bureaucracy) is associated with the position of the university as a state-owned enterprise. In this model, the university is often invested in by the State to establish and manage and supervise the school as a public enterprise. The model of a university as a community of scholars (collegium) is the earliest form of university organization that was born with medieval universities. Accordingly, universities operate according to the principles of guilds and "self-management". The basic working environment of the academic community is professional autonomy, power associated with knowledge depth and very little use of administrative hierarchy and no rigid control principles.

The corporate university model was born with the new public management movement related to a management reform in the public sector initiated in Western European countries in the 80s of the 20th century. According to this model, the concept of organizational innovation and management methods at universities should be based on increasing operational efficiency, evaluating outputs and applying management tools according to the model of enterprises.

Today, pursuing the goal of advanced university management requires fundamental and comprehensive changes based on the concept of responsibilities and roles of three parties: the State, the University and the Business community. The current context shows that universities have shifted to the model of "innovative universities... with the main characteristics being: the startup university model associated with the spirit of creative entrepreneurship (Dinh Van Toan, 2019a, b, c) operating with an autonomous nature. Here, it is necessary to understand that university autonomy includes academic autonomy for scientists, autonomy in human resource organization, financial autonomy and a system of "legal framework" for university activities to be associated with innovation, towards promoting startups. In particular, university activities need to aim to meet the requirements of stakeholders (including community service), not just training and scientific research activities.

Therefore, the role of innovation and knowledge transfer centers for society has become more and more important and can be considered the main tasks of universities today. The mission and tasks of universities have changed over the past century: Universities before the 1980s of the last century had the main task of monodisciplinary education to create skilled workers (university 1.0); Before the 1990s, interdisciplinary training was provided but the main goal was still knowledgeable workers with high professional quality (university 2.0); After the 1990s until the early years of the 21st century, universities were not only educational and scientific research institutions, but also became centers for training new knowledge, training people with multidisciplinary knowledge who could create new knowledge (university 3.0). Since the 2000s and in the period of the 4th Industrial Revolution, universities have had the mission of innovating and creating new values thanks to the space for innovation, connecting all things, cross-disciplines and learning everywhere. The products created by universities at this time are also entrepreneurs and start-ups associated with innovation - university 4.0 (Nguyen Huu Duc et al., 2018).

Advanced university governance is always associated with the requirements for effective university operations but must ensure continuous improvement of education quality, scientific research activities and transfer to serve the community. Therefore, the content of university governance is also associated with educational quality assurance activities for universities to meet new requirements in the period of higher education 4.0, expressed through the following main requirements and principles: (1) University governance is associated with university quality assurance; (2) University governance to meet the needs and satisfaction of stakeholders; (3) Contents associated with quality assurance and include: (i) Strategic governance (vision, mission, culture, resource management system); (ii) Systems governance (quality assurance, self-assessment and quality improvement); (iii) Functional governance (training, scientific research, community service); (iv) Governance of outputs (training results, scientific research, community service, finance and market connection) (Dinh Van Toan, 2019).

In summary, studies on university governance at universities in countries with long-standing educational systems such as the UK, France and China, as well as domestic studies, show that having a strong financial foundation will help universities be more proactive in promoting the influence of universities on the public, improving the quality of education and training, expanding the scale of operations, and supporting the research and development needs of the main economic activities of the region and the country. This will only be achieved when there is extremely strong financial support from the Government, technology, knowledge and human resource transfer activities between universities and businesses, or universities themselves "operating like a business" to serve the needs of socio-economic development.

Thus, with a suitable university governance mechanism, it will bring the highest efficiency to the operation of higher education institutions; will not only help standardize university operations, but also help universities model their operations, in order to promote and improve the quality of university education. At that time, products through training and research can meet the needs of the market through the number of products obtained from applied research instead of theoretical research. At the same time, it will create a quality labor source suitable for the need for large-scale recruitment from both domestic and foreign enterprises, thereby contributing significantly to the socio-economic development of our country. Only then can we achieve the goals set in the present and in the future.

2.2. Some related concepts

- *Mechanism:* The Vietnamese dictionary defines "mechanism" as the way in which a process is carried out. Mechanism is a concept used to refer to a rule of operation of a system or any phenomenon, a law or process in nature, society,

mechanism also refers to the interaction between elements that are formed by the system and thanks to that interaction, this system operates (Institute of Linguistics, 1996). "Mechanism" is a broad concept and is applied in many different fields of science, it can be seen that it is applied from natural science to social science. For the field of Education, the phrase "mechanism" is also studied and used differently, depending on the object and purpose of research of different educational majors.

- *Governance:* According to Koontz and O'Donnell (1990), governance is establishing and maintaining an environment in which individuals working together in groups can operate effectively. In the framework of this article, the author uses the concept of *governance as establishing and maintaining an environment in which individuals working together in groups can operate effectively, and at the same time effectively using all resources to complete the set goals.*

- *Higher education:* From a terminology and concept perspective, higher education can be understood as follows: (1) Higher education is "considered a production line" in which "the output is high-quality human resources". Here, people consider the work of higher education "as a factory" in which learners are products "manufactured" to meet the needs of the labor market. (2) Higher education is a "program to train future researchers". Its purpose is to create quality scientific research works with a serious working spirit. (3) Higher education is "a systematic teaching organization and is managed in the most effective way". Therefore, "focus on innovating and developing higher education institutions through building an effective governance system for training activities" to improve the quality of training with the highest possible rate of student course completion. (4) Higher education is "a platform that promotes development and expands opportunities in life for all citizens". Thanks to higher education, people have "the opportunity to develop themselves through regular, flexible and lifelong learning" (Dobbins, 2017; Clarke, 2012; William et al., 2012). In summary, in this study, the author uses *the concept of higher education as a pedagogical environment for education at a higher level with a level of specialized knowledge according to the industry and profession that the learner chooses, not training broadly in many majors and training at the university level is only for those who have the needs and have enough knowledge and skills to be able to study at the university level.*

- *University governance* is defined by researchers as a "concept" with the following "connotations": *University governance (generally referred to as university governance) is a system established and implemented in universities to ensure that the training process is consistent with the requirements of contemporary socio-economic development. With that understanding, university governance is based on principles and practices aimed at helping universities fulfill their missions and continuously improve their operations to best meet the requirements of stakeholders. Governance principles can be process-based or output-based with specific criteria so that stakeholders can monitor university activities* (Dinh Van Toan, 2020).

- *University governance model:* The author synthesizes the university governance model into groups corresponding to different approaches as follows: (1) University governance model based on the scientific community: Other variations of this "model type" are "academic governance", "collegial governance", "self-governance" based on the view of academic freedom in scientific research, teaching and learning which is considered a characteristic of academies and universities; (2) University governance model based on the State: This model and its variations "totalitarian state governance" and "political governance" assume that university governance is determined by the State and is therefore highly political and operating resources are allocated by the State and are strictly managed. The relationship between universities and the State is a "hierarchical" relationship, in which the lower level is the university, which must be affiliated with and execute the orders of the higher level, which are the State management agencies (for example: Ministry of Education & Training, Government, etc.); (3) "Market-based" university governance model: The "extreme" principle of this model is "maximum market, minimum State", in which the scientific community is also under pressure from the market. Universities are "producers, competing with each other for learners, resources and output markets with job opportunities for students as customers". This model is often "criticized" because of the risk of commercialization, businessization, turning university degrees into commodities, students into customers and lecturers into salespeople. Therefore, be "vigilant and cautious" with "manifestations of corporate-style university governance if you want to protect the interests of students, lecturers and workers" (Le Ngoc Hung, 2019).

- *Administrative and human resource governance* should be understood as all activities, organization, coordination, operation and management of information work in agencies and units to achieve certain goals. In which, important activities include job analysis, personnel recruitment, personnel training and development, personnel treatment, and evaluation of work performance (Nguyen Vu Viet Trinh, 2022).

- *Academic governance* is the sum of all the values obtained from learning and research. These are the most quintessential, quintessence, and core values of intelligence and thought. These values exist not only in theoretical academic environments but also in practice, or rather, in all environments and areas of life. Thus, an Education &

Training program is understood as an "academic program". Academic governance is the "governance of the academic program" of an educational institution in the true sense of the phrase "governance" (Nguyen Vu Bich Hien et al., 2023).

- *The university council* is an administrative organization, exercising the representative rights of the owner and related parties (National Assembly, 2019; Lam Quang Thiep, 2012).

2.3. General assessment of university governance mechanism and system of documents related to university governance in Vietnam

To get the most general assessment of the university governance mechanism and the system of documents related to university governance in Vietnam today, the author conducted an "online survey" of a number of higher education institutions. Specifically as follows: The survey sample includes 48 universities; the survey subjects are staff and lecturers; the survey format is "Google Forms"; the survey period is from September 2, 2024 to April 30, 2025; the total number of responses returned is 98 (an average of more than 2 responses/school); the survey results are processed using mathematical tools, based on the average score value, the calculation formula is as follows: $\bar{x} = \frac{\sum(k_i.a_i)}{N}$. In which: k_i: Number of points at level i; a_i: Number of opinions at level i; N: Total number of opinions at levels; $\bar{x}$: Average score.

The general situation of university governance mechanisms and the system of documents related to university governance mechanisms in Vietnam are assessed by staff and lecturers of higher education institutions according to 5 levels (with 1 being the lowest assessment level = 0 points, and 5 being the highest assessment level = 4 points).

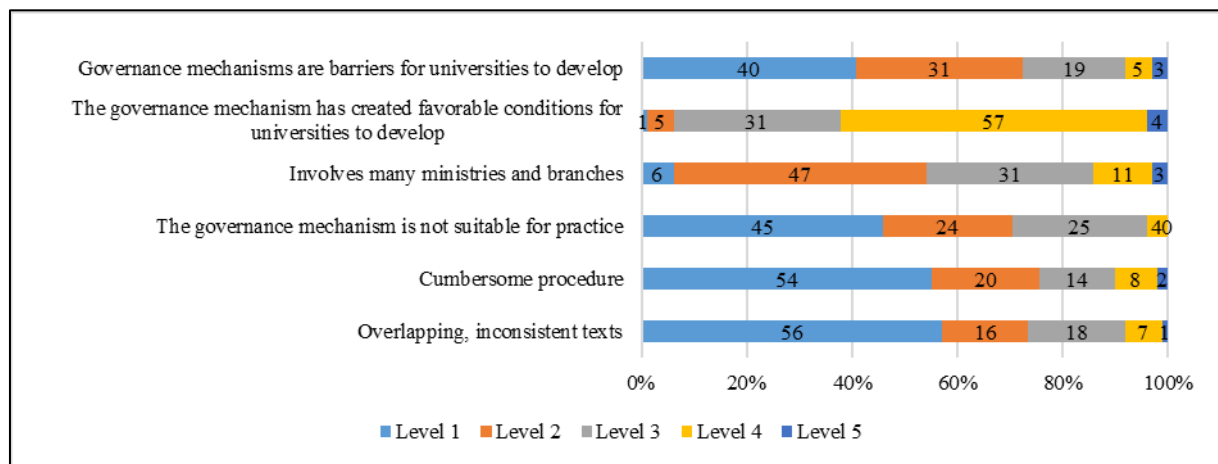**Table 1** General assessment of university governance mechanism and related document system

TT	Content	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	$\bar{x}$	Ranking
1	The system of documents related to the governance mechanism (Overlapping, inconsistent texts)	56 *57.1%*	16 *16.3%*	18 *18.4%*	7 *7.1%*	1 *1.1%*	0.79	6
2	Procedures related to the governance mechanism (Cumbersome procedure)	54 *55.1%*	20 *20.4%*	14 *14.3%*	8 *8.2*	2 *2%*	0.82	5
3	The suitability of the governance mechanism to practice (The governance mechanism is not suitable for practice)	45 *45.9%*	24 *24.5%*	25 *25.5%*	4 *4.1%*	0 *0%*	0.88	4
4	The level of relevance to many ministries and branches of the university governance mechanism (Involves many ministries and branches)	6 *6.1%*	47 *48%*	31 *31.6%*	11 *11.2%*	3 *3.1%*	1.57	2
5	General strengths of the governance mechanism for the development of universities (The governance mechanism has created favorable conditions for universities to develop)	1 *1%*	5 *5.1%*	31 *31.6%*	57 *58.2%*	4 *4.1%*	2.59	1
6	General limitations of the governance mechanism for universities to develop (Governance mechanisms are barriers for universities to develop)	40 *40.8%*	31 *31.6%*	19 *19.4%*	5 *5.1%*	3 *3.1%*	0.98	3
7	Other	0 *0%*	0 *0%*	0 *0%*	0 *0%*	0 *0%*	0	7
Average		29.45	20.85	20.12	13.41	1.89	1.09	

The results in Table 1 and Figure 1 show that the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 1.09 (min = 0; max = 4). The lowest is the criterion "Other" (accounting for 0%, ranked 7/7, so the author does not show this data on Figure 1). The general summary of the "level of assessment according to the criteria" is interpreted and commented as follows:

(1) The system of documents related to the governance mechanism (Overlapping, inconsistent texts): With level 1, there are 56 evaluation votes (accounting for 57.1%), with level 5, there is 1 evaluation vote (accounting for 1.1%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 0.79, ranked 6/7, here the staff and lecturers rate the content - this criterion relatively low.

(2) Procedures related to the governance mechanism (Cumbersome procedure): Level 1 has 54 votes (55.1%), level 5 has 2 votes (2%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 0.82, ranking 5/7; the staff and lecturers may consider these two issues "sensitive".

(3) The suitability of the governance mechanism to practice (The governance mechanism is not suitable for practice): Level 1 has 45 votes (45.9%), level 5 has 0 votes; the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 0.88, ranking 4/7; perhaps the staff and lecturers are still "hesitant" about this issue.

Figure 1 Level of assessment of university governance mechanism and current related document system

(4) General limitations of the governance mechanism for universities to develop (Governance mechanisms are barriers for universities to develop): With level 1, there are 40 evaluation votes (accounting for 40.8%), with level 5, there are 3 evaluation votes (accounting for 3.1%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 0.98, ranked 3/7; this criterion is assessed at the average level;

(5) The level of relevance to many ministries and branches of the university governance mechanism (Involves many ministries and branches): With level 2, there are 47 evaluation votes (accounting for 48%), with level 5, there are 3 evaluation votes (accounting for 3.1%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 1.57, ranked 2/7; this criterion is assessed at the "Quite high" level.

(6) General strengths of the governance mechanism for the development of universities (The governance mechanism has created favorable conditions for universities to develop): With level 4, there are 57 votes (accounting for 58.2%), this is an "average level" (score equal to 2), with level 1 (assessment level with a score equal to 0) there is 1 vote (accounting for 1%). The average score is $\bar{x}$ = 2.59, ranked 1/7; this criterion - content is assessed at the "highest" level.

Here, there are still challenges such as "inconsistency, lack of clarity and gaps in the implementation process". It is necessary for universities to continuously review and update their documentation systems, especially related to university governance, to ensure the best compliance with legal practices and requirements.

2.4. Assessment of the current status of university governance in Vietnam

The average score is $\bar{x}$ = 2.59 (min = 0; max = 4). With the measure "Other" (no staff or lecturers gave their opinions, accounting for 0%, ranked 18/18, so the author did not show this data in Figure 2). The general summary of the "level of priority for implementing measures" in university governance in Vietnam (taking the results according to two levels:

the highest and lowest of the 5 levels) is specifically interpreted for the following contents (shown in Table 2 and Figure 2):

(1) Only partial autonomy should be given to universities: At level 1, there are 39 votes (accounting for 39.8%), at level 5, there are 5 votes (accounting for 5.1%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 1.15, ranking 17/18. Here, many higher education institutions want to be granted more autonomy.

(2) Issue two separate mechanisms on university governance mechanisms of public and non-public universities: At level 1, there are 39 votes (accounting for 39.8%), at level 5, there are 9 votes (accounting for 9.2%); The average score is $\bar{x}$ = 1.27, ranking 16/18. With two separate mechanisms, it can cause "certain difficulties for the general management of the higher education system".

(3) State management agencies should manage university rankings: At level 4, there are 41 evaluation votes (accounting for 41.8%), at level 1, there are 0 evaluation votes (accounting for 0%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 2.56, ranking 15/18. The "independent evaluation and ranking of higher education institutions" in Vietnam is still not truly "objective and fair".

(4) Improve and perfect the current governance mechanism: At level 4, there are 47 evaluation votes (accounting for 48%), at level 1, there are 0 evaluation votes (accounting for 0%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 2.66, ranking 14/18. "Improving and perfecting" the current governance mechanism is "less costly" than "renewing" but must ensure "effectiveness" in governance. The university governance system can often be cumbersome and lack flexibility to changes in the educational-social environment and scientific-technological development.

(5) Innovation, promulgation of new governance mechanisms: At level 4, there were 48 votes (accounting for 49%), at level 1, there was 1 vote (accounting for 1%); the average score was $\bar{x}$ = 2.67, ranking 13/18. "Innovating and promulgating" a new governance mechanism "ensures more scientific, more appropriate, more secure..." in the governance of higher education institutions.

(6) State management agencies should manage the promulgation of standards and quality control: At level 4, there are 47 evaluation votes (accounting for 48%), at level 1, there is 1 evaluation vote (accounting for 1%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 2.72, ranked 12/18. Allowing "unification of the scale in evaluation and inspection in general...", ensuring "scientific, objective, and fair" when conducting evaluation - inspection.

(7) Diversify the composition and implement an "open mechanism" in the number of School Board members: At level 4, there are 59 evaluation votes (accounting for 60.2%), at level 1 and level 2, there are 2 evaluation votes (accounting for 2%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 2.74, ranked 11/18. By "diversifying the composition and implementing an "open mechanism" in the number of members of the University Council to "promote the intelligence and capacity of individuals...", it has contributed significantly to significantly improving the "effectiveness" in the governance of higher education institutions.

Table 2 Some priority measures in university governance in Vietnam

STT	Name of measures	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	$\bar{x}$	Ranking
1	State management agencies should manage the promulgation of standards and quality control	1 *1 %*	4 *4.1 %*	31 *31.6 %*	47 *48 %*	15 *15.3 %*	2.72	12
2	State management agencies should manage university rankings	0 *0 %*	8 *8.2 %*	38 *38.8 %*	41 *41.8 %*	11 *11.2 %*	2.56	15
3	Complete university internal regulations	1 *1 %*	1 *1 %*	29 *29.6 %*	50 *51 %*	17 *17.4 %*	2.82	9
4	Innovation, promulgation of new governance mechanisms	1 *1 %*	2 *2 %*	36 *36.7 %*	48 *49 %*	11 *11.2 %*	2.67	13
5	Improve and perfect the current governance mechanisms	0 *0 %*	2 *2 %*	39 *39.8 %*	47 *48 %*	10 *10.2 %*	2.66	14

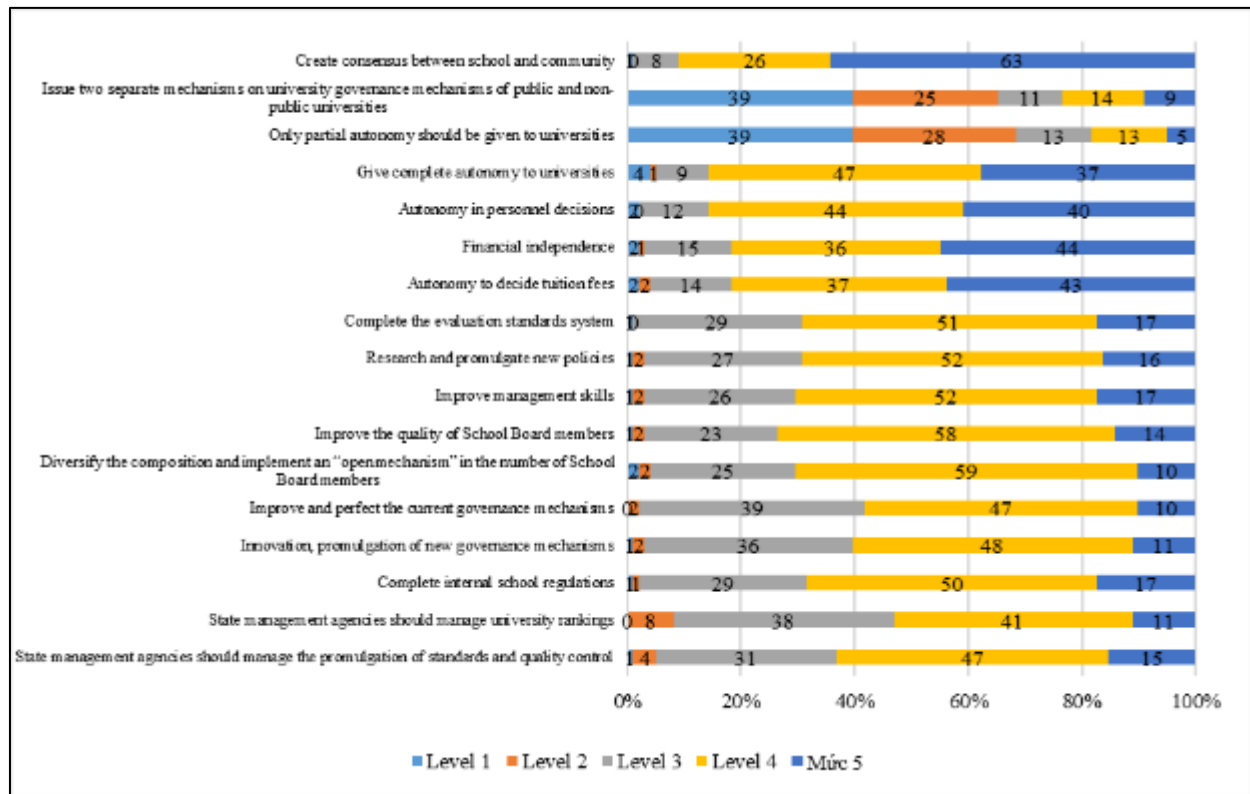|								
6	Diversify the composition and implement an "open mechanism" in the number of School Board members	2 *2 %*	2 *2 %*	25 *25.6 %*	59 *60.2 %*	10 *10.2 %*	2.74	11
7	Improve the quality of School Board members	1 *1 %*	2 *2 %*	23 *23.5 %*	58 *59,2 %*	14 *14.3 %*	2.83	7
8	Improve management skills	1 *1 %*	2 *2 %*	26 *26.5 %*	52 *53.1 %*	17 *17.4 %*	2.83	7
9	Research and promulgate new policies	1 *1 %*	2 *2 %*	27 *27.6 %*	52 *53.1 %*	16 *16.3 %*	2.81	10
10	Complete the evaluation standards system	1 *1 %*	0 *0 %*	29 *29.6 %*	51 *52.1 %*	17 *17.3 %*	2.84	6
11	Autonomy to decide tuition fees	2 *2 %*	2 *2 %*	14 *14.3 %*	37 *37.8 %*	43 *43.9%*	3.19	4
12	Financial autonomy (Financial independence)	2 *2 %*	1 *1 %*	15 *15.4 %*	36 *36.7 %*	44 *44.9 %*	3.21	3
13	Autonomy in personnel decisions	2 *2 %*	0 *0 %*	12 *12.3 %*	44 *44.9 %*	40 *40.8 %*	3.22	2
14	Give complete autonomy to universities	4 *4.1 %*	1 *1 %*	9 *9.2 %*	47 *48 %*	37 *37.7 %*	3.14	5
15	Only partial autonomy should be given to universities	39 *39.8 %*	28 *28.5 %*	13 *13.3 %*	13 *13.3 %*	5 *5.1 %*	1.15	17
16	Issue two separate mechanisms on university governance mechanisms of public and non-public universities	39 *39.8 %*	25 *25.5 %*	11 *11.2 %*	14 *14.3 %*	9 *9.2 %*	1.27	16
17	Create consensus between school and community	1 *1 %*	0 *0 %*	8 *8.2 %*	26 *26.5 %*	63 *64.3 %*	3.53	1
18	Other	0 *0 %*	0 *0 %*	0 *0 %*	0 *0 %*	0 *0 %*	0	18
Average		5.56	4.65	21.82	40.93	21.48	2.57	

(8) Research and promulgate new policies: At level 4, there were 52 evaluation votes (accounting for 53.1%), at level 1, there was 1 evaluation vote (accounting for 1%); the average score was $\bar{x}$ = 2.81, ranking 10/18. The research pointed out the shortcomings in the operation of the governance mechanism, the policies that were "outdated, backward, hindering development…", from which to propose and promulgate new policies in governance to promote the continuous development of higher education institutions in accordance with the current domestic and international context.

(9) Complete university internal regulations: At level 4, there were 50 evaluation votes (accounting for 51%), at levels 1 and 2, there was 1 evaluation vote (accounting for 1%); the average score was $\bar{x}$ = 2.82, ranking 9/18. "Improving the internal regulations of the school" contributes significantly to improving the "effectiveness" in governance.

(10) Improve the quality of School Board members: Level 4 has 58 evaluation votes (accounting for 59.2%), at level 1 there is 1 evaluation vote (accounting for 1%); Improving the management level, level 4 has 52 evaluation votes (accounting for 53.1%), at level 1 there is 1 evaluation vote (accounting for 1%); the average evaluation score for these two measures is $\bar{x}$ = 2.83, ranking 7/18. "Improving the quality of the members of the School Council & Improving the management level" along with a number of other measures to improve the "effectiveness" in governance. Improving the quality of human resources, especially effective management skills and specialization in the field of university governance.

(11) Complete the evaluation standards system: At level 4, there are 51 evaluation forms (accounting for 52.1%), at level 2, there are no evaluation forms (accounting for 0%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 2.84, ranking 6/18. "Accurate, objective, and fair" evaluation of higher education institutions is important for "effectiveness" in university governance.

Figure 2 Current status of priority levels of some measures in university governance in Vietnam

(12) Give complete autonomy to universities: At level 4, there were 47 votes (accounting for 48%), at level 2, there was 1 vote (accounting for 1%); the average score was $\bar{x}$ = 3.14, ranking 5/18. This is decisive in promoting the continuous development of higher education institutions in line with the current general trend.

(13) Autonomy to decide tuition fees: At level 5, there were 43 votes (accounting for 43.9%), at levels 1 and 2, there were 2 votes (accounting for 2%); the average score was $\bar{x}$ = 3.19, ranking 4/18. Management at higher education institutions is "more effective", "the quality of higher education is constantly improved" through the implementation of this measure.

(14) Financial autonomy (Financial independence): At level 5, there are 44 votes (accounting for 44.9%), at level 2, there is 1 vote (accounting for 1%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 3.21, ranked 3/18. Contributing decisively to promoting the continuous development of higher education institutions in line with the current general trend when implementing this measure.

(15) Autonomy in personnel decisions: At level 4, there are 44 votes (accounting for 44.9%), at level 2, there are 0 votes (accounting for 0%); the average score is $\bar{x}$ = 3.22, ranked 2/18. By implementing this measure, the development of the Vietnamese higher education system will "catch up" with the current general trend.

(16) Creating consensus between the school and the community: At level 5, there were 63 votes (accounting for 64.3%), the highest number of responses in all contents; at level 2, there were 0 votes (accounting for 0%); the average score was $\bar{x}$ = 3.53, ranking 1/18. Only by "creating consensus between the school and the community" along with "synchronously" implementing a number of other measures can we "achieve the goal of training and developing high-quality human resources", promoting the continuous development of the country's socio-economic development.

Thus, we need to create mechanisms to encourage student and faculty participation and facilitate community participation in university governance decision-making.

2.5. Some solutions to innovate university governance

In order to achieve the strategic goal of "Building and defending the Fatherland, meeting the lifelong learning needs of the people," the authors propose several innovative solutions for university governance in Vietnam as follows:

First, higher education institutions need to pay special attention to building missions, visions, strategies, and goals in the management and operation of the unit. The School Council, the board of directors with diverse members in many different positions and tasks, including lecturers, alumni, businesses and partners in Education & Training.

Second, it is necessary to eliminate the mentality of "being both autonomous and bowing" to invisible pressures such as the governing body or "being bound by autonomy" with forms and mechanisms of governance. Enhance transparency and accountability in decision-making, including information disclosure and facilitating community participation.

Third, all need to be documented, in one form or another, in university governance. Train and develop a team with management and leadership skills in higher education to improve the effectiveness of university governance.

Fourth, new "products" created through the training process must meet market needs. Meeting the demand for recruiting a large number of workers from both domestic and foreign enterprises.

Fifth, Prioritizing investment in education and training, and considering it a "top national priority," is crucial because it is a key factor determining the continuous socio-economic development of the nation.

3. Questions, exchanges and discussions

In order to contribute to raising awareness about governance issues in higher education in Vietnam, and thereby promote appropriate actions and policy recommendations, this article presents the following questions for discussion:

(1) What are the most prominent issues in university governance in Vietnam today?

Answer-exchange-discuss: Although the 2018 revised Law on Higher Education paved the way for university autonomy, in reality, many schools are still subject to deep intervention from governing bodies, especially in terms of senior personnel and finance. In addition, the management capacity of the leadership team of some schools is limited, while the school council - an important monitoring and feedback mechanism - operates vaguely. Lack of data and tools to evaluate management performance also undermines universities' strategic management capacity in an increasingly competitive context.

(2) How have information and communication technology and digital technology impacted university governance in the current period?

Answer-exchange-discuss: Information and digital technology are creating profound changes in university governance in Vietnam, from administrative activities to teaching and assessment. Online learning platforms, learning management systems (LMS) and interactive technology are also promoting the transformation of teaching and learning methods, creating a flexible and personalized educational environment. In addition to the benefits, there are still many challenges such as the gap in technology infrastructure between schools, lack of digital human resources and information security gaps. Applying technology to university management not only requires financial investment but also requires changing leadership thinking, reforming management processes and building a long-term digital strategy.

(3) How has the State's policy on higher education responded to the current challenges in university governance?

Answer-exchange-discuss: In recent years, the State has had many policies to strengthen university governance capacity, aiming to give universities more autonomy. Helps universities to be more proactive in enrollment, training, organizational structure, finance and international cooperation. However, the actual implementation still faces many difficulties, mainly due to the lack of synchronization in the guiding documents under the law, as well as the cautious mentality of management agencies and the universities themselves. In general, the State policy has made significant progress in the direction of modern management, but still needs to improve feasibility, transparency and be more closely linked to school management practices.

(4) How can universities strengthen cooperation with businesses and the community to improve governance quality?

Answer-exchange-discuss: First of all, universities need to build a mechanism for regular and effective dialogue with businesses to understand labor needs, technology trends and necessary skills in the future. Second, it is necessary to establish business advisory councils in each faculty or major to give comments on program content and strategic orientation. Third, universities can strengthen internship programs, joint training, and business semesters to help students access real working environments. On the management side, businesses can support through sponsorship programs, infrastructure investments, or co-funding of research and innovation projects. However, to do this, schools need to professionalize their connection with businesses, build negotiation, communication and partnership management capacity in a systematic, transparent and long-term strategic manner.

(5) How will university governance in Vietnam change in the next 5-10 years?

Answer-exchange-discuss: Firstly, the university autonomy model will be increasingly expanded, helping schools to be more proactive in organizing their apparatus, training, finance and international cooperation. Secondly, data-driven governance will develop, thanks to the strong application of digital technology in all management stages - from admission to assessment of learners, lecturers and training programs. Thirdly, competition in the university system will increase, requiring schools to innovate, streamline their apparatus, improve operational efficiency and affirm their brand in the region. Ultimately, the internationalization of governance will be stronger, with the adoption of international management models, increased international cooperation, and the attraction of international students and faculty. However, this process is only possible if there is a consensus on policies, appropriate investment of resources, and a change in mindset from the university management team itself.

(6) How can we improve the quality of teaching staff in the current context of university governance?

Answer-exchange-discuss: First of all, it is necessary to build a transparent system of assessment, recruitment and development of lecturers, based on actual capacity, not just on degrees or seniority. Second, schools must proactively invest in retraining, professional development and modern pedagogical skills, especially in applying technology to teaching. Third, remuneration, working environment and career development opportunities need to be improved to attract and retain talent. In the context of university autonomy, schools need to be more flexible in recruitment, build a labor contract mechanism based on capacity and work efficiency, and have policies to encourage innovation in teaching and research.

(7) Should student opinions be included in the university governance process? Why?

Answer-exchange-discuss: Yes, student opinions should be included in the university governance process, because this is one of the important principles of modern university governance – learner-centered governance. First, students can play an active role in evaluating the curriculum, lecturers and facilities, contributing to providing real data for quality improvement. Second, student participation in councils, student advisory boards or representation in the University Council will create conditions for the voice of learners to be heard at the policy level. Third, this mechanism also contributes to increasing democracy, transparency and accountability in the governance system. However, for student opinions to be truly valuable, there needs to be professional forms of consultation, training in critical skills and student representation, avoiding formality or being influenced by emotions. When properly implemented, this will be a valuable feedback channel to help improve the quality and effectiveness of university governance in Vietnam.

(8) What are the advantages and disadvantages of the current criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of university governance? Are they really suitable for the context of Vietnam?

Answer-exchange-discuss: Currently, the criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of university governance in Vietnam are mainly based on quantitative factors such as the number of lecturers, facilities, student size, and frequency of quality assessment. The advantages of this system are that it is easy to implement, convenient for comparison between schools, and suitable for management requirements from state agencies. However, the disadvantages are that it is still heavy on formality, not reflecting the depth of governance effectiveness such as the level of actual autonomy, strategic planning capacity, learner satisfaction, or the ability to adapt to the context of digital transformation and the labor market. In the context of Vietnam promoting university autonomy and international integration, the current criteria are still not completely suitable. The lack of qualitative indicators and assessment tools based on real data makes monitoring and improving governance difficult. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive and flexible set of assessment criteria that combines international standards with the specific conditions of Vietnam.

4. Conclusion and future research directions

This article has drawn important conclusions about changing and improving university governance in Vietnam, which are: innovating governance methods, applying modern and creative governance methods in university management to help improve the quality of teaching, research and general management of universities. Training and developing human resources in the field of university governance helps build and improve the quality of management teams, with the necessary knowledge and skills to face the challenges of the higher education sector. Investing in infrastructure and resources helps improve the quality of teaching and research, while having policies to attract and retain talented educators and researchers. Autonomy must go hand in hand with self-responsibility and accountability of universities. Enhance transparency and accountability in decision-making, including information disclosure. Create mechanisms to encourage student and faculty participation and facilitate community participation in university governance decision-making. Encourage innovation and flexibility in university governance systems by promoting research and innovation. The legal framework must be clear so that universities and principals dare to be autonomous and can hold their heads high in autonomy under the law, and be protected by the law. Encourage Vietnamese universities to participate in global education networks to improve the quality of training and research. The development potential of Vietnamese universities is huge, if there is appropriate investment and timely reform, the goal of becoming leading educational centers in the region is very feasible. Encourage support from the Government, businesses and the community to realize the proposed solutions. The Vietnamese Government is making efforts in education reform, enhancing the autonomy of higher education institutions, creating conditions for these institutions to be autonomous in developing training and research programs according to the actual needs of society. University governance in Vietnam has strong development potential when there are reasonable development strategies and commitments from stakeholders.

The next research direction on university governance in Vietnam, needs to focus on the following key issues to support the process of innovation and improve governance efficiency in a sustainable manner: (1) Research on university governance models suitable for the Vietnamese context. (2) The effectiveness and limitations of university autonomy associated with accountability. (3) Transparency, openness and participation in governance: Research on the role of lecturers, students and stakeholders in participating in the decision-making process, monitoring and reviewing internal policies is necessary to enhance democracy, while increasing efficiency and acceptance in governance. (4) Application of digital technology in university governance. (5) Legal mechanisms and policies to support governance innovation. (6) Linking universities – businesses – communities. (7) Internationalization in governance and university development strategy.

In short, future research issues need to be interdisciplinary, closely linked to management practices, and have the potential to suggest policies, thereby contributing to creating a more effective, transparent, and sustainable university governance system for Vietnam. This will significantly contribute to promoting the sustainable socio-economic development of the country and "realizing the goal of making Vietnam a prosperous nation by 2045, the centenary of Vietnam's National Day".

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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