

# TO MEASURE THE DEGREES OF THE AUTONOMY IN VIETNAM

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## ABSTRACT

*Through analyzing policy and regulatory documents as well as in-depth interviews with experts, this study aims to address two research purposes. First, inspired by Europe's institutional autonomy scorecard, this study aims to introduce a similar one that appropriates to the Vietnam's context. Vietnam's scorecard also has four dimensions as like the European one, these are: academic, organizational, staffing and financial. Nevertheless, the differences include: (i) the selection of specific indicators corresponding to each dimension of the scorecard; and (ii) the scoring system of the autonomy level pertaining to each indicator. These differences reflect the local attributes of Vietnam which are dissimilar to the European context. Second, Vietnam's institutional autonomy scorecard would be adopted to measure the levels of autonomy regarding four types of universities in Vietnam: (i) Vietnam national universities; (ii) autonomous public universities; (iii) regular public universities; and (iv) private universities. Findings of this study does not only provide implications for Vietnamese policymakers and institutional leaders but also stakeholders in other countries. We encourage scholars in other countries to employ a similar approach to develop scorecards that are appropriate to their local contexts.*

**Keywords:** University Autonomy, Scorecard, Measure, Public University, Vietnam, Europe

## INTRODUCTION

Institutional autonomy has been demonstrated to play an essential role in university development. It is regarded as a prerequisite condition for academic freedom in universities (Matei & Iwinska, 2018). Institutional autonomy is also a tool for universities to operate effectively in a market economy and, in particular, for testing development policies in the public sector (Wang, 2010). The worldwide models of university autonomy vary depending on the state control policy and the complexity of the model's factors (Hayden & Thiep, 2007). Previous scholars often consider university autonomy from the lens of four dimensions: academic, human resources (or staffing), organizational and financial (Jarernsiripornkul & Pandey, 2018; Mai et al., 2020). Based on these dimensions, tools to assess institutional autonomy have been developed over the previous years. Specifically, two main trends can be observed: (i) a tendency to build tools for assessing university autonomy based on university performance and, (ii) based on the interest in academic freedom in universities (Choi, 2019). In 2009, European University Association introduced the first version of university autonomy scorecard covering four main dimensions: academic, organizational, staffing and financial with more than 30 indicators in total (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009). Subsequently, this scorecard was adjusted two times in 2011 and 2017 to appropriate with the local conditions of European Union (EU) countries (Estermann et

al., 2011; Pruvot & Estermann, 2017). In brief, the scorecard aimed to quantify the level of autonomy of public universities in different EU member countries and, subsequently plays as reference for developing institutional autonomy tools in other non-EU countries such as Ethiopia (Gebbru et al., 2020) or Moldova (Turcan & Bugaian, 2014).

Vietnam has witnessed a rapid growth of newly established universities since Doi Moi (Renovation) of the whole socio-economies in 1986 (Mai et al., 2020; Pham & Vuong, 2009). This development also accelerated the transformation of the university governance model in which the former centralized university governance has been gradually replaced by more decentralized ones with more autonomy granted to universities.

Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, there is not any scorecard that can assess the degree of autonomy in Vietnamese university. Therefore, the purposes of this study are two-fold. First, this study aims to build a suitable tool to measure institutional autonomy that appropriate to Vietnamese conditions. Second, the tool introduced in the first purpose would be employed to access and benchmark the level of autonomy for different types of higher education institutions in Vietnam.

This paper is organized as follows. In Literature Review section, we would briefly revise the concept of institutional autonomy, the EUA scorecard and its application in some non-EU member countries as well as the issue of institutional autonomy in Vietnam. Next, we represent the process to develop a specific institutional autonomy scorecard for Vietnam. This section is followed by the application of this newly introduced scorecard to access the levels of autonomy of Vietnamese universities. The paper would end with discussion and conclusion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Institutional Autonomy

The concept of institutional autonomy have been discussed since the 1960s (e.g: Berdahl, 1971; Brubacher, 1967; Orlans, 1980; Volkwein & Malik, 1997) asserted that institutional autonomy may include two principal dimensions: academic and administrative. Following this, other scholars further developed these two dimensions into more details (Choi, 2019; International Association of Universities, 1998; Matei & Iwinska, 2018; Ordorika, 2003). Up to now, it appears to get a consensus among scholars that institutional autonomy is composed of four dimensions: academic autonomy, organisation, staffing (or human resources) and financing (Asia Development Bank, 2012). Apart from above conceptualizations, there is another line of studies regarding institutional autonomy from the perspective of the university's' relationship with external influences. For example, (Neave, 1988; Yokoyama, 2007) defined university autonomy into two primary forms, "*public definition*" and "*private definition*". These authors pointed out that the "*private definition*" represent academic autonomy and institutional autonomy. Meanwhile, "*public definition*" is often considered to influence external stakeholders' minds on the universities. In recent years, there has been a trend of combining two dimensions, academic freedom and administrative autonomy, to set up a new institutional autonomy assessment tool (Choi, 2019).

### The Institutional Autonomy Scorecard in Europe and other Countries

One of the most popular tools to assess institutional autonomy is European University Association's (EUA's) scorecard. It has been used throughout the past 12 years to measure the

universities autonomy levels in the EU member countries, including France, Germany, England, Italy and so forth. This scorecard was firstly introduced in 2009; and subsequently adjusted two times in 2011 and 2017 (Estermann et al., 2011; Estermann & Nokkala, 2009; Pruvot & Estermann, 2017). This scorecard defines “*institution autonomy*” as “*constantly changing relations between the state and universities and the differing degree of control exerted by public authorities, who are dependent on particular national contexts and circumstances*” (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009). Thereby, EUA considers university autonomy based on four main factors: organisational, financial, staffing, and academic. Table 1 presents the development of the EUA scorecard throughout three versions (2009, 2011 and 2017). Although the three versions of the scorecard both score the university's autonomy on four main dimensions: academic, organisational, staffing, and financial, they have some differences regarding the indicators and scoring system. For example, version 1 (2009) did not have a complete scoring system, and this scorecard only provided the weighting system based on the importance of respective indicator. However, the scorecard was updated and adjusted in 2011 (version 2) in which weighting indicators and deduction method was combined to form a new scoring system and continued in the next version (2017).

<b>Table 1</b> <b>A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE VERSIONS OF EUA SCORECARDS 2009, 2011, AND 2017</b>				
Version	Dimensions	Number of indicators	Scoring system	Source
Version 1 (2009)	Academic, Organisational, Staffing, Financial	More than 30 indicators	Weighting based on the importance of each indicators	Estermann & Nokkala (2009)
Version 2 (2011)	Academic, Organisational, Staffing, Financial	39 indicators	Combine weighting and deduction method	Estermann et al. (2011)
Version 3 (2017)	Academic, Organisational, Staffing, Financial	39 indicators	Combine weighting and deduction method	Pruvot & Estermann (2017)

With its inception, the EUA's scorecard also became references for other countries to develop their own tools to access university autonomy such as Moldova Ethiopia, or Kazakhstan (see Table 2). These studies provide evidences that on the one hand, the concept of EUA's scorecard may be adopted to other non-EU higher education systems; on the other hand, necessary adjustments should be undertaken if one may adopt EUA's scorecard to other countries (Gebru et al., 2020; Turcan & Bugaian, 2014).

<p><b>Table 2</b> <b>THE APPLICATION OF EUA'S SCORECARD IN SOME NON-EU COUNTRIES</b></p>			
<b>Countries</b>	<b>Adopted from</b>	<b>Adjustments</b>	<b>Sources</b>
Ethiopia	EUA's scorecard version 3 (2017)	No adjustment compared to EUA's scorecard (2017)	Gebru et al., (2020)
Moldova	EUA's scorecard version 2 (2011)	The scorecard includes 10 main indicators. There is no completed scoring system and the level of institutional autonomy identified by cross-case analysis. The autonomy identified by the interface of the universities with others participants.	Turcan & Bugaian (2014)
Kazakhstan	EUA's scorecard version 3 (2017)	Selected 32 indicators from EUA scorecard version 3's and assess the universities autonomy level based on the decision of government and universities without fulfil scorecard.	European University Association (2018)

### **Institutional Autonomy in Vietnam**

Prior to Doi Moi (Renovation) in 1986, the Vietnamese higher education system followed the former Soviet's higher education model, which was highly centralized governance and teaching-focused universities are the two main features (Trinh et al., 2020). Following to the Doi Moi, higher education in Vietnam has surpassed radical changes (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Pham & Vu, 2019). Among the major changes, granting more autonomy for higher education institutions have been always regarded as the key strategy. Table 3 represents the key milestones in terms of autonomization of higher education in Vietnam since the early 1990s.

Among other, the year of 1993 may be considered as the first important milestone of autonomization of higher education in Vietnam. In 9 December 1993, Vietnam's Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet signed the decree 97/CP to establish Vietnam National University – Hanoi as a merge of three other existing universities in Hanoi, these are Hanoi Comprehensive University, Hanoi National University of Education and Hanoi University of Pedagogy in Foreign Languages (The Government, 1993). Vietnam National University, which is granted more autonomy in all four dimensions of operation: academic, organizational, staffing and financial than other public ones. Vietnam National University – Hanoi is expected to become a flagship of Vietnam's higher education system, which may be ranked in the top regional and global rankings (Vietnam National University Hanoi, 2015). Under a similar mechanism of Vietnam National University – Hanoi, Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City was established in 1995.

The second important milestone of milestone of autonomization of higher education in Vietnam was in 2005. In 2005, Vietnam's government issued a so-called Higher Education Agenda Reform for the period of 2006-2020 of which autonomy for higher education institutions was identified as key measures in order to enhance higher education performance and quality. The third essential milestone was the issuance of law on higher education in 2012 and followed by its Amendment in 2018 (National Assembly, 2012 & 2018). This was the first time ever; Vietnam has a specific law on higher education. Under the framework identified by this law, autonomy has been highlighted through several measures, especially through the enforcement of university board, which is considered as prerequisite condition for success of university

autonomization in many other countries (Marklein, 2019; Salmi, 2007). It's noted that prior to Law on Higher Education 2012, university board was stipulated in an under-law regulative document, i.e., university charter's regulation in 2003 (Thiep, 2017). Nevertheless, due to the weak enforcement of university charter, only until the approval of Law on Higher Education 2012, the issue of university board has been repositioned at the center of university governance. By 2018, it was estimated that among 170 public universities in Vietnam, 58 (or 34,1%) established their own university boards (Polakova et al., 2018).

The fourth importance milestone regarding university autonomization in Vietnam was in 2014 when government issued a so-called Resolution 77 (The Government, 2014). Under the scheme of this Resolution, 23 public universities were assigned the title "*autonomous*" and were granted higher levels of autonomy in all operational aspects, compared to the other public ones. In return, these autonomous universities would agree to cease receiving recurrent allocation from the government. Many experts (e.g., Vo, 2018; Vo & Laking, 2020) called these universities as the model of "*self-funded*" or "*self-financing*" rather than the model of autonomous universities as in other countries.

<b>Table 3</b> <b>KEY MILESTONES OF UNIVERSITY AUTONOMIZATION IN VIETNAM</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Source</b>
1993 and 1995	Establishment of Vietnam National University - Hanoi (in 1993) and Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City (in 1995) by merging some extant universities.	The Government, (1993); The Government, (1995)
2005	Issuance of Higher Education Reform Agenda in which autonomization of higher education institutions was opted as one of the eight key measures	The Government, (2005)
2012 and 2018	Approval of Law on Higher Education (2012) and its Amendment (2018) in which university autonomy are highlighted.	(National Assembly, 2012) and National Assembly, (2018)
2014	Pilot of 23 autonomous public universities.	The Government, (2014)

Along with the autonomization of universities in Vietnam in practice, Vietnamese and international scholars also put efforts in investigating this issue from the academic lens (George, 2011; Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Mai et al., 2020; Nghi & London, 2010; Ninh, 2019; Pham, 2004; Vo, 2018). Most of these studies focused on analyzing the current results of university autonomy evolvement (Vo, 2018; Vo & Laking, 2020) or the obstacles that inhibit the implementation of autonomization. Some studies tried to build a framework for assessing the university autonomy level in Vietnam (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Mai et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these two studies still bear limitations such as: data is outdated (Hayden & Thiep, 2007); indicators are incomplete and only cover parts of the operational activities of universities (Hayden & Thiep, 2007; Mai et al., 2020) or scoring system is incompleted (Mai et al., 2020). Hence, the primary purpose of this study is to fill this gap by developing an institutional autonomy scorecard that is appropriate to Vietnam, based on the EUA's one. Following this, the second purpose of this study is to adopt the scorecard developed in the first purpose to access the levels of autonomy of three main types of public universities in Vietnam, i.e., national university, autonomous university, and regular public university.

## The Present Study

The scorecard is composed of two main components: indicators and scoring system. In this section, we describe how our selected indicators and scoring system were developed. Next, we describe how autonomy level pertaining to each indicator was scored.

## Selecting Indicators

The process of selecting indicators start with the indicators extracted from EUA scorecard version 3 (Pruvot & Estermann, 2017). To ensure the eventual indicators may cover all the operational activities of the universities in Vietnam, the indicators extracted from the EUA scorecard version 3 were benchmarked with Law on Higher Education 2012 (National Assembly, 2012), its amendment (National Assembly, 2018) and an under-law decree (The Government, 2019). Two co-authors with enriched experiences as managers in higher education institutions were assigned to conduct this benchmark. This step yielded the first lists of indicators for assessing university autonomy in Vietnam. This first lists were further feedbacked by three experienced scholars and managers who are working for three main types of higher education institutions as mentioned above i.e., national university, autonomous university, and regular public university. These three scholars and managers feedbacked in three aspects: (i) to suggest new indicators or to eliminate the existing indicators; (ii) to combine different indicators into a single indicator or to divide one indicator to different indicators; and (iii) to adjust in terms of terminology to ensure the readability. Table 4 represents our suggested indicators to assess the university autonomy, which is appropriate to Vietnam's context. Specifically, there are seven indicators under the dimension of academic. The respective figure for three other dimensions (i.e., financial, organizational, and staffing) are five, four and seven. Overall, we have 23 indicators of the Vietnam's university autonomy scorecard.

Table 4 DESCRIPTION FOR UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY INDICATORS			
No	Dimension	EUA version 3 (2017)	Vietnam's university autonomy indicators
1	Academic	Overall student numbers	Decision of overall student number
		Admissions procedures at Bachelor level	Decision of student admission procedures and criteria
		Admissions procedures at Master's level	
		Introduction of programmes at Bachelor level	Open and termination of degree programmes
		Introduction of programmes at Master's level	
		Introduction of programmes at doctoral level	
		Termination of degree programmes	
		Language of instruction at Bachelor level	Selection of language of instruction
		Language of instruction at Master's level	
		Selection of quality assurance mechanisms	Selection of quality assurance mechanisms
		Selection quality assurance providers	Selection of quality assurance providers
		Capacity to design content of degree programmes	Decision of curriculum and content of degree programmes
2	Financial	Length of public funding cycle	
		Type of public funding	
		Ability to borrow money	Ability to borrow money
		Ability to keep surplus	Ability to keep surplus
		Ability to own buildings	Ability to own buildings
		Tuition fees for national/EU students at	Decision of tuition fees for Vietnamese students

		Bachelor level	Decision of tuition fees for international students
		Tuition fees for national/ EU students at Master's level	
		Tuition fees for national/ EU students at doctoral level	
		Tuition fees for non- EU students at Bachelor	
		Tuition fees for non - EU students at Master's level	
		Tuition fees for non - EU students at doctoral level	
3	Organisational	Selection procedure for the executive head	Appointment and dismissal of the Rector/President
		Selection criteria for the executive head	
		Dismissal of the executive head	
		Term of office of the executive head	
		External members in university governing bodies	Appointment and dismissal of Chairperson of University Board
		Capacity to decide on academic structures	Decision on establishing and closing of subsidiary units
		Capacity to create legal entities	
			Appointment and dismissal of Chairperson of Science and Education Committee
4	Staffing	Recruitment procedures for senior academic staff	Recruitment of Vietnamese staff
		Recruitment procedures for senior administrative staff	Recruitment of international staff
		Salaries for senior academic staff	Salaries and bonus payment for Vietnamese staff
		Salaries for senior administrative staff	Salaries and bonus payment for international staff
		Dismissal of senior academic staff	Decision on professor promotion, evaluation, reward, and fire
		Promotion procedures for senior academic staff	
		Dismissal of senior administrative staff	Decision on senior administrative staff promotion, evaluation, reward and fire
		Promotion procedures for senior administrative staff	
			Decision on staff training and development

## Developing Scoring System

To develop the scoring system, we adopted the scale of World Bank's rubric (Demas & Arcia, 2015) to measure the school autonomy and accountability rather than the EUA scorecard's one. It's partly due to the clarity and ease of use of the World Bank's rubric, and partly due to the ambiguity of EUA scorecard's scoring system. Similar to the process to develop indicators, we also adjust the World Bank rubric to match with Vietnamese situations. Three experts participating in the round to develop indicators also involved in this round to give feedbacks for our scoring system. Table 5 represents our eventual scoring system with five levels (compared to four as accounted in World Bank's) and their respective description.

Table 5 THE SCORING SYSTEM OF UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY	
Level	Description
1	Level 1 refers to the situation in which university has no authority in decision of its own internal issue
2	Level 2 refers to the situation in which university has authority to decide its own internal issue with a pre-approval of external authority body (e.g., a governmental agency)
3	Level 3 refers to the situation in which a university has authority to decide its own internal issue but it must follow a process or criteria strictly regulated by an external authority body. As the process and/or criteria is strictly regulated, it may result in a significant inefficiency of university operation.

4	Level 4 refers to the situation in which a university has authority to decide its own internal issue but it must follow a process or criteria moderately regulated by an external authority body. As the process and/or criteria are moderately regulated, it may result in a moderate inefficiency of university operation.
5	Level 5 refers to the situation in which a university has authority to decide its own internal issue with no or slight and necessary regulation of external authority body in terms of process and criteria.

### Scoring the Level of Autonomy

To achieve the score of autonomy pertaining to each indicator, we conducted interviews with 15 experts with five ones dividing to three types of university equally (see Table 6 for participants' profile). It is noted that three experts participating in providing feedbacks to develop autonomy indicators also joined in this round.

An interview session may last from 45 to 60 minutes. We started an interview with a brief introduction of the research purposes as well as an explanation of the indicators and scoring system. This aim to ensure that the interviewee would use the scoring system concretely to score level of autonomy pertaining to each indicator. Subsequently, the interviewee was requested to select which indicators they want to score. This step was conducted because one may not have experiences in all aspects of university operations e.g., a dean of department may know about academic matters but not financial matters, or a human resource manager may understand organizational/staffing matters but not academic matters. The interviewee was requested not only to score the level of autonomy pertaining to their selected indicators but also provide the rationale and explanation or his/her scoring. For example, we may request interviewee to provide evidence (e.g., a legislative document or a case study) to illustrate his/her argument and scoring.

Table 6 PARTICIPANTS' PROFILE	
Characteristic	Frequency
<b>Participating in</b>	
Both two steps: selecting indicators, developing scoring system and scoring the level of autonomy	3/15
Only scoring the level of autonomy	12/15
<b>Type of affiliation</b>	
National university	3/15
Autonomous university	3/15
Public university	3/15
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	10/15
Female	5/15
<b>Age</b>	
Under or equal to 30	1/15
31-40	4/15
41-50	7/15
Equal or above 50	3/15
<b>Position</b>	
Middle manager (head/deputy head of department, faculty or office)	11/15
Senior manager (rector/vice-rector, member of university board)	4/15
<b>Degree</b>	
Master	4/15
Doctor	11/15



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 7 represents the results of Vietnam's university autonomy scorecard. Specifically, Table 7 showcases scores of autonomy pertaining to each indicator/dimension, and to each type of university, respectively. Generally, in terms of dimension of autonomy, it appears that public universities in Vietnam, disregarding its type (national, autonomous or regular public) are granted the highest level of autonomy in academic (Mean=3.90, SD=0.17). This is followed by the level of autonomy in staffing (Mean=2.95, SD=0.16), organizational (Mean=2.58, SD=0.29) and financial (Mean=2.47, SD=0.12).

Meanwhile, in terms of type of university, it appears that autonomous university has the highest level of autonomy (Mean=3.12, SD=0.63), followed by national university (Mean=3.00, SD=0.69) and regular public university (Mean=2.81, SD=0.66).

A closer look on Table 7 and Figure 1 would provide the picture of similarities and dissimilarities in terms of autonomy level among three types of universities, according to each indicator and dimension. Specifically, regarding academic autonomy, it appears that all types of universities have equal levels of autonomy in all indicators, except the authority in "*open and termination of degree programmes*". Thus, regular public university is assigned level 2 of autonomy in "*open and termination of degree programmes*", compared to level 4 at two other types of universities (national and autonomous). Regular public university, indeed, is the only type of institution must ask for the approval of Ministry of Education in Training before opening (or terminating) of degree programmes.

Compared to five other indicators under academic dimension, "*selection of quality assurance mechanisms*" and "*selection of quality assurance providers*" are the two indicators with lowest levels of autonomy (3 at all three types of universities, compared to 4 or 5 in other indicators). This may be explained as follows: quality assurance in Vietnam, to larger or lesser extents, is only at the immature step of development. Vietnam now only have five certified quality assurance providers and only two quality assurance mechanisms are accepted: the national one and the another belong to ASEAN University Network (Nguyen & Shah, 2019). In other words, universities in Vietnam do not have sufficiently diverse options for their quality assurance practices.

Regarding financial autonomy, as our findings revealed that public universities are granted the low levels of autonomy in terms of finance, it implies a conservative viewpoint of government regarding financial management: tuition fees are capped with predetermined ceiling set by the government (autonomous university's ceiling of tuition fee is higher than the two other types of university's), no university has the discretion in keeping surplus or owning their buildings, the authority to borrow money is also limited as all must universities must ask for approval from their line ministries. The only financial indicator that universities may have high levels of autonomy is "*decision of tuition fees for international students*".

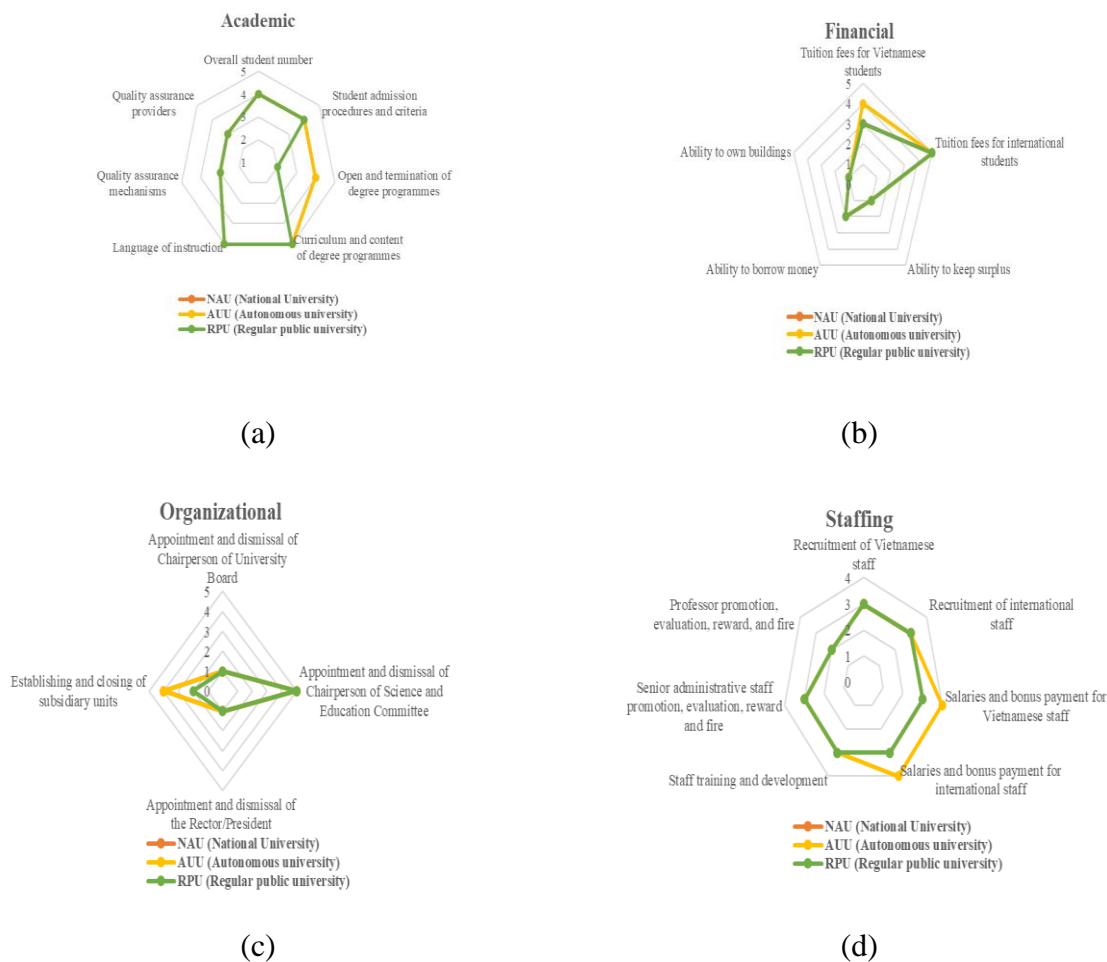
Regarding organizational autonomy, our findings are highly homogenous among different types of universities. As chairperson of university board and Rector/President of university should be appointed by the government or line ministries, according to the current legislation (National Assembly, 2018), levels of autonomy of all three types of university are scored as 1 at "*Appointment and dismissal of Chairperson of University Board*" and "*Appointment and dismissal of the Rector/President*". In contrast, as chairperson of Science and Education Committee (the position equals to chairperson of faculty senate in some other countries) is appointed by the rector/president, level of autonomy of all three type of university is scored as 5 at "*Appointment and dismissal of Chairperson of Science and Education Committee*".

Similar to what observed with organizational autonomy, our findings with staffing autonomy revealed a high convergence among different types of university. Specifically, all universities, regardless their types are granted same levels of autonomy in different indicators of staffing, except the cases of autonomous university at “Salaries and bonus payment for Vietnamese staff” and “Salaries and bonus payment for international staff”. As being granted more autonomy, autonomous university has higher level of autonomy in paying salaries and bonus for their Vietnamese and international staff. Regarding most other indicators, including “Recruitment of Vietnamese staff”, “Recruitment of international staff”, “Decision on staff training and development”, and “Decision on senior administrative staff promotion, evaluation, reward and fire”, all types of university must follow strictly the related regulations issued by Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Education and Training. It is noted that in Vietnam, administrative staffs and faculty members are still government servants; thus, it’s obvious that they should be under the auspice of Ministry of Home Affairs, apart from Ministry of Education and Training.

<b>Table 7</b> <b>RESULTS OF VIETNAM’S UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY SCORECARD AT THREE TYPES OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES</b>					
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>NAU</b>	<b>AUU</b>	<b>RPU</b>	<b>Mean (SD)</b>
<b>Academic</b>	Decision of overall student number	4	4	4	4 (0)
	Decision of student admission procedures and criteria	4	4	4	4 (0)
	Open and termination of degree programmes	4	4	2	3.33 (1.15)
	Decision of curriculum and content of degree programmes	5	5	5	5 (0)
	Selection of language of instruction	5	5	5	5 (0)
	Selection of quality assurance mechanisms	3	3	3	3 (0)
	Selection of quality assurance providers	3	3	3	3 (0)
	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>4 (0.82)</b>	<b>4 (0.82)</b>	<b>3.71(1.11)</b>	<b>3.90 (0.17)</b>
<b>Financial</b>	Decision of tuition fees for Vietnamese students	3	4	3	3.3 (0.58)
	Decision of tuition fees for international students	5	5	5	5 (0.)
	Ability to keep surplus	1	1	1	1 (0)
	Ability to borrow money	2	2	2	2 (0)
	Ability to own buildings	1	1	1	1 (0)
	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>2.40(1.67)</b>	<b>2.60(1.82)</b>	<b>2.40(1.67)</b>	<b>2.46 (0.17)</b>
<b>Organizational</b>	Appointment and dismissal of Chairperson of University Board	1	1	1	1 (0)
	Appointment and dismissal of Chairperson of Science and Education Committee	5	5	5	5 (0)
	Appointment and dismissal of the Rector/President	1	1	1	1 (0)
	Decision on establishing and closing of subsidiary units	4	4	2	3.33(1.15)
	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>2.75(2.06)</b>	<b>2.75(2.06)</b>	<b>2.25(1.89)</b>	<b>2.58(0.29)</b>
<b>Staffing</b>	Recruitment of Vietnamese staff	3	3	3	3 (0)
	Recruitment of international staff	3	3	3	3 (0)

	Salaries and bonus payment for Vietnamese staff	3	4	3	3.33(0.58)
	Salaries and bonus payment for international staff	3	4	3	3.33(0.58)
	Decision on staff training and development	3	3	3	3(0)
	Decision on senior administrative staff promotion, evaluation, reward and fire	3	3	3	3(0)
	Decision on professor promotion, evaluation, reward, and fire	2	2	2	2(0)
	<b>Mean (SD)</b>	<b>2.86(0.38)</b>	<b>3.14(0.69)</b>	<b>2.86(0.38)</b>	<b>2.95(0.16)</b>
	<b>Overall Mean (SD)</b>	<b>3.00(0.69)</b>	<b>3.12(0.63)</b>	<b>2.81(0.66)</b>	<b>2.97(0.65)</b>

Note: NAU denotes national university, AUU denotes autonomous university, and RPU denotes regular public university.



**FIGURE 1**  
**THE AUTONOMY LEVEL OF VIETNAM PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES BY 4 DIMENSIONS**

## CONCLUSION

Despite being poisoned at the center of the higher education reform in Vietnam over previous decade, there have been few studies examining this topic in the extant literature. Among these few studies, there is not yet any work, which may provide a quantitative analysis of the current picture of autonomy in Vietnam. This study, which is inspired by the EUA scorecard, aims to fulfill this gap. Specifically, based on EUA scorecard's indicators, we developed 26 indicators of autonomy, which is suitable to Vietnam's context. These 26 indicators are divided into four dimensions of autonomy, including academic (7 indicators), financial (5 indicators), organizational (4 indicators), and staffing (7 indicators).

Furthermore, based on World Bank's school autonomy rubric, we developed a scoring system to evaluate the levels of autonomy pertaining to 26 indicators of autonomy. The 26 indicators, in couple with its scoring system have formed a so-called "*Vietnam's university autonomy scorecard*". Subsequently, the new scorecard was employed to score the autonomy levels of three types of public universities in Vietnam, i.e., national university, autonomous university and regular public university.

Our findings revealed that in average, disregard types of university, public universities are granted highest levels of autonomy in indicators under academic dimension. This is followed by staffing dimension, organizational dimension, and financial dimension.

While types of university are taken into consideration, it is revealed that autonomous university is granted the highest levels of autonomy, especially in the following indicators "*Decision of tuition fees for international students*", "*Decision of curriculum and content of degree programmes*", and "*Selection of language of instruction*".

National university and regular public university appear to have similar levels of autonomy in most all indicators, except some selected indicators such as "*Open and termination of degree programmes*", or "*Decision on establishing and closing of subsidiary units*" in which the former type of university is granted higher autonomy than the latter.

This study provides several implications, both in terms of theoretical and practical. First, this study follows to extend the EUA scorecard to introduce a specific scorecard for a non-EU country that is Vietnam. Second, compared to other studies on university autonomy in Vietnam, which appear to focus on qualitative description, this one is the first ever may provide a quantitative picture of all aspects of university operation. Higher education policymakers in Vietnam as well as university leaders and managers may use the results of this study as inputs for their further evaluation and decision making.

## Limitations and Avenues for further Studies

As like as many others do, this study also has several limitations (Vuong, 2020), which may be avoided by further studies. First, this study only represents a descriptive statistic of levels of autonomy of Vietnam's public universities but not investigate the relationships between levels of autonomy with other factors, such as university performance and outcomes. This limitation, without doubt, would be useful for other scholars to consider in their future research. Second, this study only focuses on a single country, i.e., Vietnam. Future scholars may avoid this limitation by introducing a scorecard, which may be employable to several countries in a region, such as ASEAN countries or Asia-Pacific countries.

Third, this study only focuses on the side of "*policy intent*" of autonomy but ignore another side, which is "*policy implementation*". As noted by Lee, there are always gaps between

“policy intent” and “policy implementation”. Future studies are recommended to conduct investigation on the aspect of “policy implementation” of university autonomy, or “de factor” university instead of “de jure” autonomy as in this study.

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