

Some Solutions to Improve the Effectiveness of Autonomous Activities at Public Vocational Education Institutions in Hanoi



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ABSTRACT: In accordance with Article 25 of the Vocational Education Law of 2014, public vocational education institutions autonomously engage in activities related to organizational and personnel management, finance and assets, training and technology, international cooperation, and quality assurance as stipulated by law. In 2021, public vocational education institutions in Hanoi were transitioned to an autonomous mechanism through a city resolution. Consequently, this research aims to assess the current level of autonomy and propose solutions to enhance the effectiveness of autonomous operations for public vocational education institutions in Hanoi.

KEYWORDS: Autonomy; vocational education; finance; organizational personnel; academic; autonomous management

1. INTRODUCTION

Implementing autonomy to improve the quality of training at public vocational education institutions (PVEIs) in general and public vocational education institutions in Hanoi City in particular is one of the most important tasks for schools to improve the quality of vocational education. Through autonomous activities, the training activities of the schools will be closer to the needs of the labor market. According to Article 25 of the Vocational Education Law 2014, PVEIs are autonomous in the activities in the fields of organization and personnel, finance and assets, training and technology, international cooperation, and quality assurance in accordance with the law. In 2021, 17 colleges and vocational schools under the management of Hanoi City were issued decisions to transfer to the autonomous mechanism. Specifically, 7 colleges have transferred to the autonomous mechanism and ensured all regular operating expenses, including: Hanoi Dong District College of Health, Hanoi College of Health, Hanoi College of Commerce and Tourism, Hanoi College of Electronics and Refrigeration, Hanoi Vocational College of Industry, Hanoi Vocational College of High Technology, Vietnam-Korea Vocational College. For vocational schools, all 10 vocational schools under the city's management have transferred to the autonomous mechanism and self-ensured all regular operating expenses. In this, North Thang Long Economic - Technical College and Hanoi Technical Informatics College have implemented financial autonomy since their establishment. The remaining 8 vocational schools (8 schools) have implemented self-assurance of all regular operating expenses since 2021.

However, the autonomous activities of the schools are still facing many difficulties. Schools need a management model towards autonomy to implement the training activities of the school in an effective way. Therefore, assessing the current state of autonomy of public schools in Hanoi City will be the basis for proposing a suitable management model towards autonomy.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS

Concept of Autonomy in Public Vocational Education Institutions

The term "autonomy" has been extensively discussed in economic and social studies. For vocational education institutions, autonomy involves the right to manage all aspects related to admissions, curriculum, assessment, recruitment, finance, and research without control or influence from any government level (Tight, 1992; Anderson and Johnson, 1998). Verhoest et al. (2004) consider autonomy in managing functions, policies, structures, finances, and legal matters, including government intervention in vocational education institutions. Jongbled (2004) and Ordorika (2003) emphasize academic, appointment, and financial aspects as reflections of institutional autonomy. According to the Vocational Education Law of 2014, PVEIs exercise autonomy in organizational and personnel management, finance and assets, training and technology, international cooperation,

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and legal quality assurance. They are responsible for explaining to relevant state authorities, learners, and society regarding their organization, management, and training quality.

Autonomy essentially involves transferring decision-making powers from the state to educational institutions. The content of autonomy may evolve over time but is consistently associated with organizational structure and personnel, academic affairs, finance, and accountability. Thus, autonomy in vocational education institutions grants decision-making authority over all aspects of institutional operations (organizational structure and personnel, academic affairs, finance, accountability), limiting state interference to achieve optimal institutional performance.

As per the Vocational Education Law of 2014, vocational education institutions include vocational training centers, vocational colleges, and higher education colleges. These institutions can be public, private, 100% foreign-invested, or joint ventures between domestic and foreign investors. They exercise autonomy in organizational and personnel management, finance and assets, training and technology, international cooperation, and legal quality assurance, with a responsibility to explain to competent state agencies, learners, and society about their organization, management, and training quality.

Content of autonomy of public vocational education institutions

Anderson and Johnson (1998) proposed six criteria for evaluating the level of autonomy of vocational education institutions: academic autonomy, financial autonomy, organizational and human resources autonomy, admissions and training autonomy, scientific activity autonomy, and international relations autonomy. Puvot & Estermann (2017) again mentioned 4 criteria reflecting the level of autonomy of vocational education institutions: organizational autonomy, financial autonomy, human resources autonomy, and academic autonomy. According to the Regulations on Secondary Vocational Schools and Regulations on Colleges in 2021, the right to autonomy of vocational education institutions includes: professional autonomy, organizational and human resources autonomy, and financial and property autonomy. Therefore, the evaluation of the current state of the management model towards autonomy of public vocational education institutions can be reflected through the following criteria:

Functions and duties

The functions and duties of vocational education institutions are clearly reflected in the goals, missions, strategies, and development plans of the school in the Regulations on Secondary Vocational Schools and Colleges in 2021. This is also one of the contents reflecting the level of autonomy of vocational education institutions. In addition, determining, announcing, methods, quotas for admissions, methods of organizing, managing training and forms of training in accordance with the law; choosing an organization for vocational education quality assurance (including private organizations or organizations established by the state or foreign organizations) are also criteria reflecting the level of autonomy of the functions and duties of public vocational education institutions (Vũ Thị Thanh Thủy, 2012; Puvot & Estermann, 2017; Nguyễn Trọng Tuấn, 2018).

Organizational Structure and Personnel

The organizational structure and personnel capabilities of vocational education institutions are demonstrated through the right to establish organizational structures, recruit and dismiss personnel, and make decisions on personnel matters, including leadership and scientific titles (Anderson and Johnson, 1998). Leadership capabilities and vision play a crucial role in the autonomy of vocational education institutions (Nguyễn Chí Hường, 2018). Simultaneously, vocational education institutions also have the right to define terms of office and dismissal of executive leaders (Puvot & Estermann, 2017). Based on the regulations of vocational colleges and higher education institutions in 2021, vocational education institutions have the right to decide on the following matters: autonomy in organizing the organizational structure and personnel according to regulations on establishment, restructuring, dissolution of public-service units, and the number of employees; autonomy in establishing and promulgating regulations on the organization and operation of the institution, determining the functions and tasks of affiliated organizations; autonomy in issuing internal regulations on the organization of the organizational structure and personnel.

Finance and Assets

The financial sources of vocational education institutions are diverse and can be formed from state funding, tuition fees, and contributions from educational sponsors (Sheelan, 1997). Therefore, autonomy in mobilizing resources for vocational education institutions is only associated with the financial contributions of students, organizations, and enterprises. For effective training activities, vocational education institutions need to be autonomous in managing revenue, expenditures, asset management, management of dedicated funds, management of debts to be repaid, and distribution of surplus funds (Trần Đức Cân, 2012). According to Anderson and Johnson (1998), vocational education institutions need to be autonomous in issues related to financial management, budget utilization, and financial sources of the institution. Nguyễn Thị Hường and Tạ Ngọc Cường (2016)

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suggest that vocational education institutions need to be autonomous in budgeting for training expenses, salary regimes for employees, setting up funds for the institution, and investing in and exploiting the use of facilities. Additionally, the ability to generate surplus is also a content reflecting the level of financial and asset autonomy of vocational education institutions (Pvuvot & Estermann, 2017).

Moreover, financial and asset autonomy of vocational education institutions is also demonstrated in the regulations of vocational colleges and higher education institutions in 2021, specifically in the institutions' autonomy to establish and organize the implementation of internal spending regulations; regulations on asset use; regulations on financial transparency, internal audits as per regulations.

Academic autonomy

The right to autonomy is closely linked to the academic freedom of vocational education institutions (Nguyễn Trọng Tuấn, 2018). Academic autonomy is the degree of independence and self-responsibility of the school, of the scientist in academic research from identifying tasks, deciding on the structure, content of the training program, ensuring the quality of programs and degrees. Specifically, vocational education institutions exercise autonomy in matters related to admissions and learner management, teaching methods, assessment of learner academic results, program content, and teaching materials. They are autonomous in academic standards such as diploma standards, issues related to quality assessment and verification. Institutions exercise autonomy in deciding strategies, plans, and implementing scientific and technological activities, as well as in international relations, establishing cooperative relationships with individuals and organizations abroad within the framework of legal regulations and international standards (Anderson and Thomas, 1998).

In addition to the above, Pvuvot & Estermann (2017) added criteria to assess the level of academic autonomy of vocational education institutions, including autonomy in determining the number of applicants, selecting candidates based on criteria set by the institution, autonomy in choosing the language of instruction, and autonomy demonstrated through the capability to design training program content.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research results were conducted based on survey data of 17 public colleges and intermediate schools that have been assigned full autonomy for all recurrent expenditures by the Hanoi People's Committee by 2021. At each school, The research team directly interviewed 10 people, including: leaders of vocational education institutions, staff working directly in positions of human resources, finance, scientific research and teachers.

The survey content addressed issues reflecting the current status of the autonomous activities of public vocational education institutions in Hanoi in the following areas: mission and functions, organizational structure and personnel, finances, assets, and academics.

After the survey, the data were synthesized, cleaned, and processed using SPSS 22.0 software.

The research team employed descriptive statistical analysis to assess the current level of autonomy of public vocational education institutions in Hanoi. The results of this study served as the basis for proposing solutions to enhance the effectiveness of autonomous activities in public vocational education institutions in Hanoi.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Mission and Functions

According to survey results, when vocational education institutions are transferred to full autonomy of regular costs, they have high autonomy when performing their functions and tasks. The criteria in this section were clearly reflected on the institutions' information portals. Among them, the criterion "determining the methods of organizing and managing training, forms of training according to legal regulations" received the highest autonomy rating, with an average assessment score of 4.23. Annually, based on actual conditions, institutions proactively set targets, scales, admission methods, and develop training fields in accordance with legal regulations. Therefore, the autonomy level for these criteria was highly rated. However, some surveyed vocational education institutions still struggled to demonstrate a clear level of autonomy in determining their mission, vision, strategy, and development plans.

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Table 1: Assessment of automatic function tasks

Criteria	Number Respondents	Percentage (%) of Average Autonomy Level					Standard Deviation	
		Very low	Low	Normal	High	Very high		
C221. Autonomy in determining the goals, mission, strategy, and development plan of the institution	170	0	0	34.7	48.8	16.5	3.82	.694
C222 Autonomy in determining and announcing the admission methods	170	0	0	8.2	64.1	27.6	4.19	.568
C223 Autonomy in determining admission targets and enrollment scale	170	0	0	22.4	45.9	31.8	4.09	.732
C224 Autonomy in determining the methods of organizing and managing training, forms of training as prescribed by law	170	0	0	15.9	45.3	38.8	4.23	.705
C225 Autonomy in constructing and determining training professions	170	0	0	27.1	48.8	24.1	3.97	.717
C226 Autonomy in choosing the organization to inspect the quality of vocational education for training quality inspection	170	0	0	8.8	68.2	22.9	4.14	.547

Source: Survey results of the research team

Organizing apparatus and personnel

The organizational structure and personnel of public vocational education institutions are still under the management of state management agencies (Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, Hanoi People's Committee...). Regarding criteria reflecting the content of organizational structure and personnel, criteria related to appointment, recruitment (including building recruitment procedures, criteria, selection standards, and tenure for school leaders), appointment of professional titles, promotion, and transfer of professional titles for employees demonstrated low autonomy with average assessment scores ranging from 2.41 to 2.74. This indicates that vocational education institutions have not achieved complete autonomy in the organization of their structure and personnel. The survey process showed that although institutions were actively constructing and proposing criteria and standards for selecting school leaders, organizational structure, deployment, and rotation of staff for management positions from deputy principals or principals, they did not have the authority to decide on these matters. The direct management agencies of public vocational education institutions were the ones with decision-making power. However, according to new regulations, schools have the autonomy to plan, appoint, and recruit staff for positions from the level of director/deputy director downward. The principal of the school will directly sign the decision to recruit staff and sign employment contracts with those who are selected. In addition, schools also have the authority to decide on the rotation of officials, teachers, and employees within the school. The criteria, standards, and recruitment procedures have been determined based on the actual needs of the school and according to the legal regulations (Decree No. 161/2018/ND-CP dated November 29, 2018, of the government, and Circular No. 03/2019/TT-BNV dated May 14, 2019, of the Ministry of Home Affairs amending and supplementing some regulations on the recruitment of civil servants, public employees, promotion of civil servants, public employees, and implementation of contracts for certain types of work in state administrative agencies, public non-business units...). The school principal is the one who signs the decision to acknowledge the recruitment results and signs the employment contract with the staff, while reporting to the higher management authorities.

Criteria reflecting welfare benefits for employees, the establishment and issuance of internal expenditure regulations, and the establishment of grassroots democratic regulations received high ratings for autonomy. The percentage of high and very high autonomy ratings for these criteria was over 80%. Among them, the criterion "decision-making on welfare benefits for employees" received the highest autonomy rating with an average assessment score of 4.21. Criteria with low and very low autonomy ratings in this survey included establishing teacher standards, training plans, staff training (87.82%); appointment of professional titles, promotion, and transfer of professional titles (94.1%); establishment, reorganization, dissolution of public institutions, and the number of workers (100%). The reasons reflecting the low autonomy level are due to financial resource constraints, so the appointment, promotion of professional titles, and the development of training plans and staff training will increase the operating costs of the school. On the other hand, schools are subject to direct management by state management agencies, so the establishment, reorganization, dissolution of schools, or the appointment, promotion of professional titles for officials, teachers... are not determined by the schools but must be approved by these agencies.

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Table 2: Assessment of the level of organizational autonomy and personnel

Criteria	Number Respondents	Percentage (%) of Average Autonomy Level					Standard Deviation	
		Very low	Low	Normal	High	Very high		
C221 Autonomy in building the process of selecting school leaders	170	2.4	45.3	34.1	12.4	5.9	2.74	.683
C222 Autonomy in building and determining the criteria and standards for selecting school leaders	170	2.4	58.2	34.1	5.3	0	2.42	.751
C223 Autonomy in determining the working term of the head of the institution	170	14.7	34.7	37.6	12.9	0	2.49	.774
C224 Autonomy in appointing, reappointing, dismissing, and disciplining leaders in the institution	170	11.8	43.5	35.9	8.8	0	2.42	.619
C225 Autonomy in arranging, assigning tasks, mobilizing, appointing, transferring employees	170	0	0	41.2	52.9	5.9	3.65	.590
C226 Autonomy in choosing to build the structure, organization, staffing plan, contractual labor, and recruitment	170	4.7	54.7	35.9	4.7	0	2.41	.554
C227 Autonomy in establishing teacher standards, training plans, training and fostering officials, teachers	170	0	35.3	35.2	11.8	0	2.76	.646
C228 Autonomy in deciding employee welfare policies (salary increase, rewards, discipline, etc.)	170	0	0	5.3	68.8	25.9	4.21	.521
C229 Autonomy in appointing professional titles, promotions, title transfers	170	0	0	52.4	41.8	5.9	2.54	.607
C2210 Autonomy in establishing, reorganizing, dissolving public career units, and the number of employees	170	42.4	57.6	0	0	0	1.58	.496
C2211. Autonomy in establishing, issuing regulations on the organization and activities of the school, specifying the functions and tasks of organizations under the school	170	0	0	11.8	70.6	17.6	4.06	.541
C2212 Autonomy in issuing democratic regulations at the grassroots level, issuing internal regulations on organizational structure and personnel	170	0	0	7.1	76.5	16.5	4.09	.477

Source: Survey results of the research team

Financial Autonomy and Assets

According to the survey results, the level of financial autonomy and asset management in public vocational education institutions in Hanoi is evaluated as not being high. Specifically, the implementation of the criterion "determining tuition fees in training activities" is perceived to be low, with an average score of 2.38. The reason is that these criteria are bound by regulations related to tuition fees, regulations related to the use of assets of state management agencies such as the Ministry of Education and Training, the Department of Labor - War Invalids and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Finance. ... According to Article 9 of Decree 81/2021/ND-CP, which stipulates the tuition fee ceiling from 2022 to 2026: for public vocational education institutions that ensure regular expenditure, the maximum tuition fee is not more than 2 times the tuition fee ceiling applied to vocational education institutions that do not ensure regular expenditure. Based on the practical conditions, some institutions may determine tuition fees for certain fields of study below the regulatory ceiling set by the state. However, for specialized fields that require high training costs, institutions find themselves constrained by these regulations. If institutions determine tuition fees higher than the prescribed fees by the government, they will be in violation of the law. Conversely, if institutions set tuition fees below or equal to the prescribed ceiling, they may face difficulties in training activities as the generated revenue may not be sufficient to offset the incurred training costs.

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Table 3: Assessment of the level of financial and asset autonomy

Criteria	Number Respondents	Percentage (%) of Autonomy Level				Average Autonomy Level	Standard Deviation	
		Very low	Low	Normal	High			
221. Autonomy in determining tuition fees in training activities	170	18.2	32.4	42.4	7.1	0	2.38	.689
222. Autonomy in mobilizing resources from organizations and businesses	170	0	0	14.1	51.8	34.1	4.20	.667
223. Autonomy in expanding revenue sources from research activities, consulting, technology transfer	170	56.5	43.5	0	0	0	1.44	.497
224. Autonomy in using and managing expenditures (investing in development for training activities, paying salaries and additional income, setting up funds for the school, etc.)	170	4.7	57.1	24.1	14.1	0	2.48	.793
225. Autonomy in purchasing, using assets, land for exploitation and increasing revenue	170	33.5	42.9	22.4	1.2	0	1.91	.853
226. Autonomy in building, investing in facilities, equipment for training activities	170	47.1	48.2	4.7	0	0	1.58	.583
227. Autonomy in using surplus for training activities	170	4.7	14.1	15.2	2.9	28.2	3.05	.783
228. Autonomy in building internal expenditure regulations	170	0	0	9.4	66.5	24.1	4.15	.562
229. Autonomy in building asset use regulations	170	0	4.7	9.4	61.8	24.1	4.05	.724
2210. Autonomy in building regulations for publicizing finances, internal audit	170	0	4.7	9.4	52.4	33.5	4.15	.774

Source: Survey results of the research team

Academics

According to the survey results, the criteria "building, defining the mission, objectives, structure, and content of the training program", "determining the admission methods of the training programs", "deciding the strategy, plan and implementation of scientific research activities" and "organizing the compilation or selection of teaching materials suitable for the training objectives" were rated at high and very high levels of autonomy with a rating rate of over 85%.

Most institutions autonomously select students based on criteria that align with the practical training needs of the institution, in addition to criteria set by the Ministry of Education and Training. The average rating for autonomy in selecting students is 3.93. Depending on the industry and program codes, institutions choose different admission criteria.

The survey results also show that schools are autonomous in testing, evaluating, and assessing the quality of training activities with a high and very high autonomy rating of 72.4%. Most of the schools participating in the survey have functional departments to carry out the work of testing, evaluating the quality of training activities with clear goals and tasks. The level of autonomy of these two criteria has an average rating of 2.54 and 2.46, respectively.

The survey further reveals that public vocational education institutions in Hanoi have not achieved autonomy in selecting the language of instruction for training programs. Therefore, the criterion "choice of language of instruction" is assessed at a very low level of autonomy, with an average score of 1.98.

Table 4: Assessment of academic autonomy level

Criteria	Number Respondents	Percentage (%) of Autonomy Level				Average Autonomy Level	Standard Deviation	
		Very low	Low	Normal	High			
C221 Autonomy in developing, determining tasks, objectives, structure, and content of training programs	170	0	0	10.0	48.8	41.2	4.31	.646
C222 Autonomy in determining the admission methods of training programs	170	0	0	12.4	58.2	29.4	4.17	.625
C223 Autonomy in determining the scale of admissions	170	0	54.1	38.2	7.6	0	2.54	.636

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C224 Autonomy in selecting students through criteria defined by the school	170	0	0	28.2	50.6	21.2	3.93	.701
C225 Autonomy in choosing the teaching language	170	25.3	51.2	23.5	0	0	1.98	.701
C226 Autonomy in opening training programs	170	12.4	41.8	33.5	12.4	0	2.46	.864
C227 Autonomy in deciding the strategy, plan, and implementation of research activities	170	0	0	14.1	57.6	28.2	4.14	.637
C228 Autonomy in organizing the compilation or selection of teaching materials suitable for training objectives	170	0	0	13.5	50.6	35.9	4.22	.668
C229 Autonomy in testing, evaluating, and ensuring the quality of training activities	170	0	0	27.6	51.8	20.6	3.93	.693
C2210 Autonomy in issuing degrees, certificates, managing the issuance of degrees and certificates to students	170	0	20.6	64.1	15.3	0	2.95	.598
C2211 Autonomy in developing research activities, international cooperation according to the school's development strategy and plan	170	0	0	38.2	51.2	10.6	3.72	.644

Source: Survey results of the research team

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Revitalizing the autonomy mechanism of public vocational education institutions in Hanoi is a natural imperative, guided by clear state direction and ensuring stringent quality control. The research results indicate that institutions autonomously fulfill their functions and duties. However, autonomy in organizational structure and personnel, finance and assets, as well as academic autonomy, is not yet high. To enhance the effectiveness of autonomy, public vocational education institutions in Hanoi should implement the following solutions:

The improvement of the legal system and the mechanisms, as well as the management policies of the Government and the People's Committee of Hanoi, is highly essential for vocational education institutions to effectively carry out autonomous activities. This includes the specific delegation of authority to the school council and the school principal, as well as the reduction of managerial functions and operations by state management agencies in relation to vocational education institutions. Public vocational education institutions need to build and develop strategic plans in the following areas: admissions, curriculum development, and teaching plans. Specifically, these institutions should autonomously conduct admissions after transparently implementing publicly announced criteria. Admissions can be conducted in multiple phases throughout the year to meet the demands and orders for labor training from businesses and organizations.

The quality assurance areas of the school are determined on the basis of the criteria and standards for quality assurance of vocational education according to Circular No. 15/2017/TT-BLĐTBXH dated June 8, 2017 of the Minister of Labor - Invalids and Social Affairs Regulations on criteria and standards for quality assurance of vocational education. The focus of the school's quality management areas are: Quality Management of Teaching and Learning Activities, Quality Management of Training Programs and Curriculum, Quality Management of the Staff, Quality Management of Facilities and Training Equipment, Quality Management of Services for Learners and Graduates.

In terms of finance and assets, public vocational education institutions need to plan according to the self-reliance mechanism for the sources of income from training activities from different levels, scientific research. When implementing self-reliance, schools will no longer be supported by regular expenditure from the state budget, therefore the mechanism for ordering and assigning tasks in training must be clearly specified. In addition, vocational education institutions need to pay attention to the remuneration, development of teaching staff and management staff.

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