



Original Article

Internationalization of Higher Education in the Context of Higher Education Autonomy: A Case Study of Vietnam National University, Hanoi

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Abstract: In the context of integration and development in Vietnam, universities have been moving from centralized management to subsidized decentralized management and towards increasingly autonomous management to meet the goals of higher education innovation and integration. This paper evaluates the international identity in Vietnam in general and at Vietnam National University, Hanoi (VNU) in particular in the context of higher education autonomy. The paper also discusses a number of policy factors affecting international cooperation at VNU, namely the role of scholarly exchanges for students and lecturers in the context of international integration and the impact of international joint training programs on the internationalization of higher education at VNU.

Keywords: VNU, Vietnam, autonomy, internationalization, higher education.

1. Introduction

Autonomy in Higher education, a trend of development, is a pre-requisite for implementing administrative approaches in order to reform and improve the training quality. For the purposes of the study, university autonomy was defined in terms of the freedom and authority enjoyed by universities

and institutions of higher education to play their role and contribute to societal development within the framework provided by public authorities (N.V. Varghese and Michaela Martin 2014) [1]. Therefore, the global trend is shifting gradually from a State controlled model to a State supervision model. The autonomy issue in German universities changed in the early years of 21st century, when the government controlled most of their activities. M. Kreysing (2002) [2] presented information on the reform at a well-known university in Germany and points out that universities need

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to find appropriate methods to increase their competitiveness and autonomy even in a state-controlled environment.

There are seven components of autonomy in higher education, in which autonomy in academic activities and educational programs such as teaching methods, assessment and evaluation of learning outcomes, curriculum content and materials are the important factors in the international integration process of higher education (D. Anderson & R. Johnson, 1998) [3]. In this sense, the problem of internationalization of national education system in general and internationalization of its separate educational and business entities in particular become very important (P. Koudelkova et al., 2015) [4]. Knowledge generation is a borderless enterprise, but Vietnamese academic institutions lack meaningful international connections. Indeed, young foreign educated scholars frequently cite the concern that they will be unable to stay current in their fields as a reason why they wish to avoid careers in the Vietnamese academy (J.V. Thomas & Ben Wikinson, 2008) [5].

In the context of higher education autonomy, the international identity has become important to support teaching and research activities towards global integration. Internationalization process is of key importance among the factors that determine the modern development of higher education system in the world. The higher education institutions have to improve the initiative and the creativity of the leaders, staff in training, scientific research, international cooperation activities (Hai PTT 2017) [6].

Why is internationalization important in the higher education autonomy context? In developed countries, universities' mission, in general, is not only the transfer of knowledge and education for lifelong learning, productive employment and engaged citizenship. Universities also have the role as a social conscience of society in their pursuit of truth and in their articulation of universal values (I. Moses 2007) [7]. In order to develop higher

education in accordance with the general trend of the society, it is necessary to renovate university governance according to the trend of autonomy, apart from the issues related to academic autonomy, Internationalization of higher education is essential for successful international integration.

In general, higher education in Vietnam is still slowly reforming and is still in weak condition. The achievements of higher education is not stable, not systemic and fundamental, has not met the demands of industrialization and modernization of the country, the learning needs of the people and international integration requirements in the new era ... weakness inadequacies in management mechanisms, procedures and training, teaching and learning methods, teaching staff and educational managers, efficiency in the use of resources ... should soon be overcome (J. Knight, 2007) [8]. The authors have taken this as an axiom that needs no proof the fact that internationalization is one of the factors which increases competitiveness of educational systems in general and of certain universities in particular.

In the context that the Vietnam government is granting more autonomous rights to universities, facing higher education reform and global integration, there should be a serious research on internationalization process in Vietnam from 1995-2016.

2. Methodology

This study examined the issues of (i) higher education policies about autonomy in Vietnam; (ii) the internationalization process in the higher education autonomy context; (iii) a case study of Vietnam National University Hanoi (VNU) of internationalization process in the higher education autonomy context.

The study aims to assess the current status of the internationalization of Vietnam higher education in the autonomy context. The method of investigation used by the authors for the first

issue include study the progress of issuing policies relating to autonomy in higher education; Autonomous elements are empowered for universities, including internationalization of higher education. The method for the second issue includes aspects of internationalization of higher education in Vietnam, synthesis and systematization of some internationalization activities in higher education, analysis of some typical examples related to internationalization. The data is collected through the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET).

For the third issue's method is to analyze the study at VNU. A survey is conducted online, collected from 256 faculty member, 28.91% of those were managers, 29.30% specialists, 33.98% lecturers and the rest in other positions. The degree level proportion includes 45.31% of Ph.D., 41.02% of Master level and the rest as bachelor degree. The survey is analyzing the VNU staffs' awareness about university's autonomy. The issue of internationalization of higher education is one of the five dimensions of this survey. Therefore, this research aims to assess the internationalization process of higher education at VNU in the autonomy context which includes the role of exchanging student and faculty members; and the internationalization of the curricula.

3. Research result

3.1. Higher education policies about autonomy in Vietnam

School autonomy was first mentioned in the Education Law (Vietnam National Assembly, 2005) [9] which said those schools, colleges, universities granted with autonomy and self-responsibility as prescribed by law and the charter schools in the training, recruitment, organizational structure of the institution and its finance. Higher education establishments are self-responsible in activities mainly in the areas of organization and human resources, finance and assets, training, science and technology, international cooperation, higher education quality assurance. Higher education institutions

implement autonomy in higher level matching capability, rankings and results of inspection of the quality of education"(Vietnam National Assembly, 2012) [10].

Implementing the Education Law, since the school year 2005-2006, the MoET has implemented piloting autonomy for five universities (Bui Tu, 2017) [11]. In parallel with the pilot, the MoET promulgated the university charter (Prime Minister, 2010) [12] which was renewed in 2014 (Prime Minister, 2014) [13]. Duties, authority, autonomy and accountability of universities state that (i) the autonomy of universities comply with the provisions of Article 32 of Higher Education Law and a number of specific provisions of the decision objectives, strategies and development plans of the university, decided to establish the organizational structure, autonomous financial revenue and expenditure, to ensure quality, training, scientific research; (ii) Accountability of universities demonstrated in the following activities: report publicly and explain to the bodies of state management and stakeholders about the activities of the school in accordance with the law, Commitment to state management agencies and responsible for all activities to achieve the commitments; Do not let any person or entity take advantage of the name and facilities (Prime Minister, 2014) [13].

Education policies issued for Renovation of basic and comprehensive education and training, meeting industrial and modernization requirements in economic conditions of socio-economic orientation and integration during this time. The Resolution 77/NQ-CP on piloting innovative mechanisms of action for public higher education institutions during the 2014 to 2017 period (Vietnamese Government, 2014) [14]. Accordingly, in order to encourage public higher education institutions to actively use rational, efficient resources to enhance the quality of higher education and reduce spending on the state budget, while not reducing opportunities to access higher education for poor students, students are subject to specified policies; public higher education institutions

and schemes autonomy and self-commitment to ensure full operational funding recurrent and capital expenditures are made autonomous, comprehensive and self-responsibility.

The policy of basic and comprehensive reform of education and training to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization in the context of socialist-oriented market economy and international integration is appropriate in the current period. Vietnam has developed in a market economy. The university is a special kind of business, which produces special goods of which products are graduates. Human resource production in a market economy as well as all other business activities must be autonomous in "production" and be responsible for their "products".

Autonomy is much cared about by the society. Some studies about autonomy have been discussing governance model of higher education towards autonomy, or focus on each specific field such as financial autonomy, management of faculty members in multidisciplinary universities from a self-reliant and socially responsible perspective.

Vietnam emphasizes the promotion of autonomy in education and the expansion and enhancement of the effectiveness of international cooperation in the Education Development Strategy 2011-2020. The fourth Solution is about autonomy in education and the eighth solutions are about internationalizing education. The contents of internationalization include: Encouraging Vietnam to cooperate internationally in education; Encouraging foreign organizations to invest in, sponsor for education, participate in teaching and scientific research, apply science and technology transfer to improve education in Vietnam.

3.2. The internationalization process in the higher education autonomy context

Higher Education and knowledge are fundamental to social and economic development, and it aims to proactively invest to equip citizens with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to compete economically in a

rapidly changing society. But there are many challenges involved in trying to develop an internationally competitive system against a background of low per capita national income and a continuing legacy of centralized planning (Vietnam Government, 2006) [15].

Based on the research result about Vietnam educational and training programs which has concluded that the training quality is relatively low which means the training programs has low efficiency, graduates are weak in academic and practical capacity, self-teaching ability, foreign language and ICT skills. Assurance of academic quality is a pre-requisite to the prudent allocation of funds to higher education institutions by the government, foundations, corporations, or other sources. Establishing an independent accreditation process in which judgments about institutional and program quality are based on informed and objective academic peer reviewed assessments would be an effective step helping to achieve internationally accepted quality.

Under the current condition, the financial resources, the human resources and the managing approaches have not been guaranteed to construct and develop certain universities in Vietnam into world class level. Thus, the feasible solution is to combine the existing infrastructure and human resources of potential universities as well as research centers with the support of standardized international universities partner to develop new training models which are of high quality and international standards. By this, Vietnam could deploy a high quality educational and training system and achieve world-class standards. Furthermore, the lessons and experience conducted from the implementation's process could contribute to the "Fundamentally and Comprehensively Innovation of Vietnam Higher Education" (Vietnam Government 2005) [16].

Facing this problem, the Vietnamese Government advocates are focusing on developing higher education. A part of this policy is granting the legal autonomy and accountability to higher education institutions

(Vietnam Government 2012). Self-determination in training programs and being active in international co-operation are two main contents included in the autonomy law. Moreover, the internationalizing policies had been implemented and became reality through certain imprints. From the fact about the socio-economic development in the trend of globalization, and the rising trend of Vietnamese students studying abroad as well as studying at international educational institutions, the competition of international training programs and the commitment to expand upon the WTO accession, etc., Vietnam higher education is required to have new development and breakthrough in terms of quality, modernity and internationalization to attract not only local but also international student, and avoid to risk of losing the market to provide higher education service right in Vietnam. A number of policies to encourage Vietnamese citizens to study abroad have contributed to increase the proportion of high quality human resources involved in the internationalization of education. The Government of Vietnam devotes a large budget to this scholarship fund such as 322, 911 and 599 (The Prime Minister, 2000; 2010; 2013) [17-19].

The participation of international scholars is extremely active in recent years in terms of research and training of Vietnam universities. Over the years, the Fulbright Program in Vietnam is one of the effective in Vietnam which has helped US scholars to work at Vietnamese universities and research institution in the field of information technology, public health, environmental science, economic and specially, education; over 400 Vietnamese earn advanced degrees in the United States, while bringing hundreds of Americans here, over the past 14 years. The associated Fulbright Economic Training Center is a wonderfully innovative, intensive one-year program for 70 Vietnamese professionals each year (Michael W Michalak, 2008). Furthermore, other programs and NGOs such as the ASIA Non-government Funds, Japan Foundation has provided hundreds of volunteer teachers and scholars who come from many countries, to

work in Vietnam. The participation of international scholars has brought in the new vitality for the system, aroused the aspirations for international integration and broadened the vision of the academic staffs which promotes innovations in terms of teaching method and creative thinking.

International student exchange activities are mainly invested in order to seek for the skills and experience learning opportunities for Vietnamese students in the context of international integration. The opening door to the World has been widening to Vietnamese lecturers and students. Vietnamese citizens, who are currently studying abroad and experiencing the international cultures and knowledge, are actively contributing to the internationalization process of Vietnam universities.

In the 1990s, the co-operation activities with international partners were initially formed, however, in a few numbers which mainly through the government level co-operation programs. Several government-level co-operation programs which had been approved since 1995 could be listed as The Vietnam-Belgium Master Training Programs, the French-Vietnam Co-operation Training programs, the Vietnam-Netherlands projects, the Vietnam-French High Quality Engineering Training programs (PFIEV) and the Vietnam - Japan information technology engineer training program.

After Vietnam's accession to the WTO (2006), the investment of foreign countries in Vietnam under the form of joint-higher education training programs started to develop excessively. At present, there are 485 international joint-training programs are licensed for non-profit activities and are mainly funded by student's contributions. Specifically, 44% of the joint training programs are reviewed and licensed by 5 universities and 14 higher education institutions are piloted to grant autonomy in international co-operations (Vietnam Government 2014) [14]. This figure demonstrates that internationalization of higher education and autonomy in co-operation has increased in the recent years.

As of 2016, there are 83 Vietnam higher education institutions have signed the joint-training agreements with 224 foreign education institutions of 33 different countries and territories. Countries and territories with dominant number of programs affiliated with Vietnamese education institutions include US

(78); France (75); UK (72); Australia (42); China (34) and Taiwan (27).

The international joint-training programs are organized under various forms such as Full-time training in Vietnam or half of the training programs in Vietnam and half in the partner-university countries.

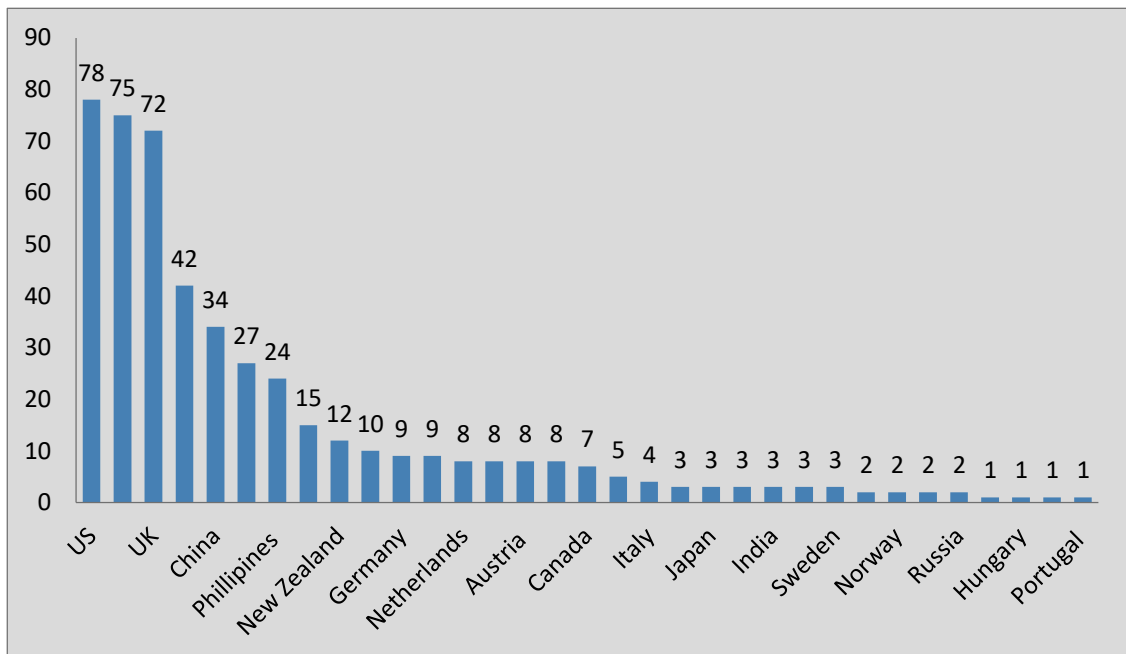


Figure 1. Number of international joint-operation training programs by countries and regions.

Most of the international joint-training programs are designed similarly as a studying aboard program. Specifically, most of them are touched in English, others in French or some in Chinese. Due to the weak foreign language skills, this is one of the biggest barriers of Vietnam Higher education institutions during the enrolment process.

The international joint-training programs are implemented for all levels of education but focus primarily on undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. At nationwide level, there are 233 undergraduate international joint-training programs (48% of total programs), 206 master international joint-training training programs (accounted for 42, 5%) and 9, 5% of the total joint training programs are for Ph.D., diploma, intermediate and certificate level. However, the joint training programs are implemented in many fields with many

diversified professions, but the proportion in education field is unfortunately imbalance.

The higher education institutions in Vietnam have paid a major attention to the forming and development of the joint-training program in the field of Economics and Management (approximately 60% of the country's overall joint training program). The remaining are Engineering and Technology; Social Science and Humanities; and Arts and Pharmacy programs as the major containing the least joint programs. Additionally, most of the certificates of the joint training program are issued by the foreign partner institutions. Another small number is jointly awarded by the both side of the co-operation (06/485 programs, equivalent to 1.2%) or some by Vietnamese education institutions (16/485, equivalent to 7% of the overall programs) (Moet report 2016).

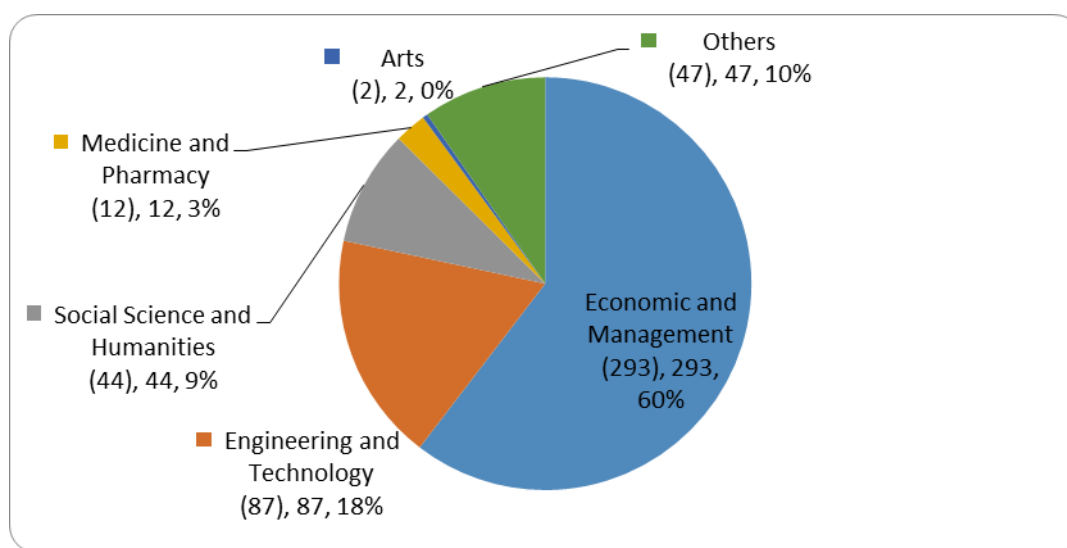


Figure 2. International joint training-program by proportions of field.

3.3. A case study of Vietnam National University Hanoi

Vietnam national University Hanoi (VNU) always affirms that international relations are the main driving force to promote resources in order to serve the overall development of VNU to become an international standardized research university. The international relations activities is diversified in terms of content and form, with many effective international cooperation programs on training research that demonstrate strength and potential cooperation of VNU. VNU always strives to prioritize the development of long-term and reliable cooperation with prestigious universities, well-known scientific and educational organizations, foreign corporations and enterprises under the form of scientific research, technology transformation, international cooperation in undergraduate and post-graduate program, organizing international science seminars, exchange of student, academic staffs and faculty members.

In terms of implementation of internationalizing and autotomizing Higher

Education, VNU has taken a brand-new step in developing academic staffs such as i) piloting policies on supporting high-level scientists; ii) deploying activities to attract international scholars in VNU in the term of 2016-2020. VNU has deployed the project Developing High quality scientists and administrators, with a target of 26% teachers who are able to teach in English by 2020; 26% scientific research having published journals, seminars, projects; and high number of leaders having international science projects and quotas in specific training majors. Looking for international partners has been focused by the member universities of VNU.

This study conducted the opinion of lecturers on the question which managing level should decide the concept of searching international partners. Most of respondents reveal that the university/educational institutions itself should be able to look for its partners (85, 94%). This shows that there is a consensus about the autonomy in searching for international partners through the guideline and direction of government.

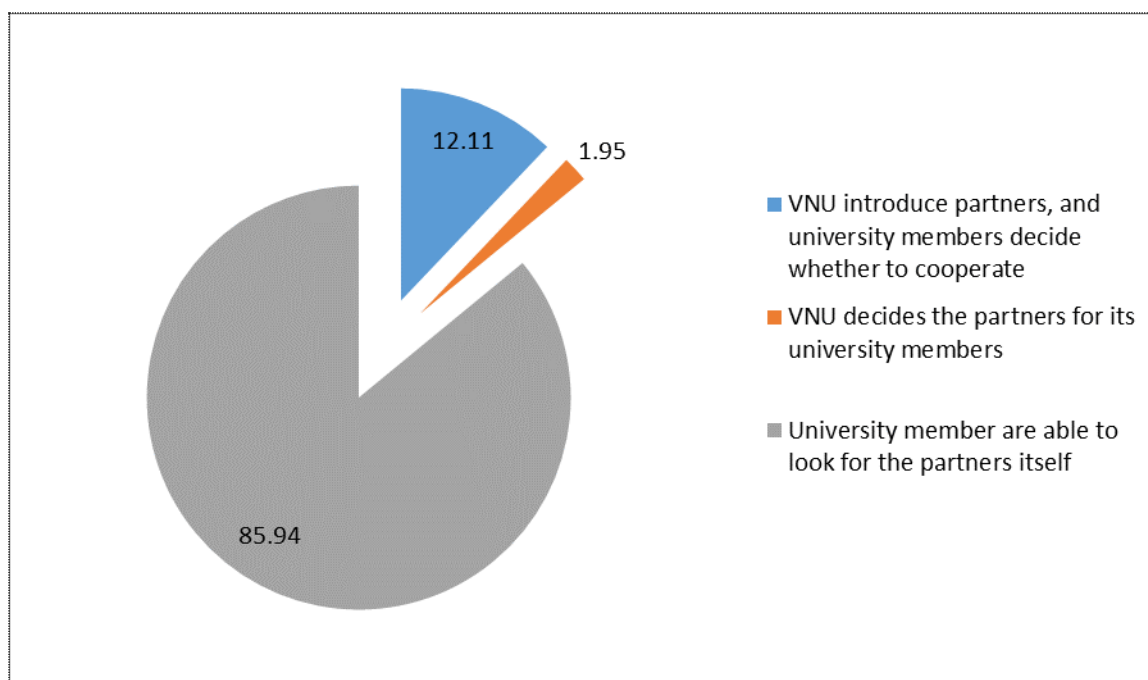


Figure 3. Opinions of VNU lecturers in terms of looking for international partners.

VNU has completed the report on the status of granting autonomy to its members which will be submitted the managing level of VNU for the guideline to deploy the regulations on the autonomy mechanism in the public members of VNU. Besides, VNU has implemented many reasonable solutions which created favorable conditions for nearly 400 professors and associate professors from local training and research institutions as well as hundreds of prestigious scientists in the world to visit, teach and exchange in VNU.

VNU has been implemented a unique program “to invite foreigners and Vietnamese staying abroad to visit and work, teach and research in VNU”. Accordingly, the member universities have been pointed the missions to develop their strategies, programs, international cooperation plans, to report back to VNU for approval of international cooperation training programs before implementation.

Every year, VNU welcomes hundreds of lecturers and international scientists coming to teach and research. Typical research groups (25 groups) were established and researched with the participation of international scientists from

countries such as Germany, Japan and Korea. The International Director of the Key Laboratory is a prestigious and influential foreign scientist in the region and in the world in the field of science.

The exchange of faculty and students between VNU and international universities is increasing. The data in the table below shows VNU teachers' exchange to abroad increasing from 2016 to 2018 is 22,6%, The Foreigners teachers' exchange at VNU tăng 13,2%. Besides, the number of international exchange students also increased, for example: VNU students' exchange to abroad tăng 20%, The Foreigners students' exchange at VNU 13,8%.

At VNU, international undergraduate programs are designed flexibly. Students are able to choose to whether to study full-time or part-time and receive a degree from an international partner school. There are 6 units in VNU conducting a total of 26 international cooperation training programs at undergraduate and post-graduate level. The unit which having most affiliated programs is the Faculty of International Studies with 12 programs.

Table 1. Number of exchange teachers/students between VNU and the international Universities

Number of exchange teachers/ students	Year 2016	Year 2017	Year 2018
VNU teachers' exchange to abroad	351	603	796
The Foreigners teachers' exchange at VNU	415	465	551
VNU students' exchange to abroad	374	577	749
The Foreigners students' exchange at VNU	1050	1163	1449

The cooperation form is likely diverse, for example: full-time and part-time degree programs; part-time study abroad program (students study a semester at VNU, the rest of the time studying at foreign partner schools) enables students to a variety choices of training options. After 1.5-3 years of studying at VNU, students in English major could be transferred their final years to universities that have

cooperation agreements with VNU. VNU is autonomous in finding international partners for joint training, but the partners need to ensure the quality standards of training such as have performed quality assurance and rankings.

This study at VNU shows the perceptions of the VNU lecturers on the choice education accreditation partners as in the figure 4.

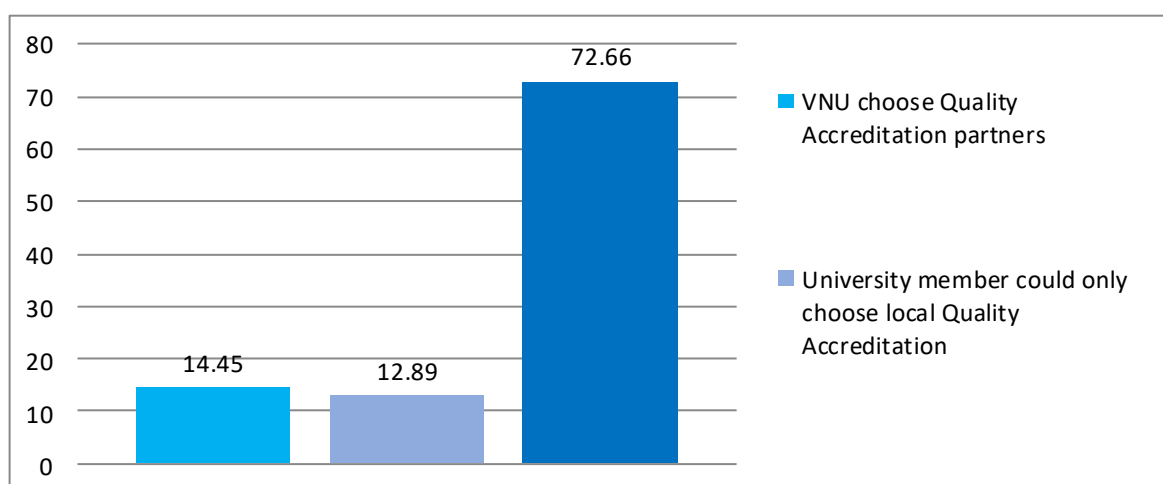


Figure 4. Right to be chosen education accreditation partners.

By implementing international cooperation training programs, the members of VNU, indicated that the Quality Accreditation is always a top priority. The study investigates the views on the power to choose an educational quality accreditation agency. The results show that 72.66% of the respondents considered that the university was free to choose the quality assurance agency according to their needs (including agencies from other countries). This means that the opinion about autonomy in quality assurance in this survey is significant.

This idea is correct and proportional to the number of training programs of VNU which has been tested in accordance with AUN-QA standards, accounting for over 40% of the whole program that has been tested in Vietnam.

4. Conclusion

By analyzing the policies on higher education autonomy which opens the new context to push the process of

internationalization of, it is clearly seen that there is a significant development in the trend of internationalization of higher education which is could be shown through:

- The participation of international scholars in the research and training activities in Vietnamese universities. This has brought new vitality to the system, aroused the aspirations for international integration and broadened the vision of the academic staffs, as well as promoted innovations in teaching methods and creative thinking.

- The rising number in the participation of Vietnamese scientists at international conferences and seminars. The bridge connecting with the outside world is opened to Vietnamese teachers and students. Moreover, Vietnamese citizens studying abroad with international experiences in science and culture are actively contributing to the internationalization of Vietnamese universities.

- International cooperation is not only aimed to settle the place of study and fulfill the need of human resources for production and business establishments. International cooperation's have a further, more strategic goal: to import advanced educational technology, to train faculty and to contribute to the modernization of Vietnamese higher education. The practices of international cooperation show that short-term and long-term goals are closely associated. If they fail to fulfill the task of assuring the quality of training and supplying human resources up to international standards, they can not accumulate and perform long-term tasks.

It could be affirmed that the autonomy context to push the internationalization of Vietnam higher education. Through the investments in the higher education system, the establishment of universities with the participation of international elements, the exchanges of lecturers, students and collaborative research are growing trend of development which has been supported by the Government of Vietnam and other stakeholders. This trend has deeply affected Vietnamese universities in all aspects and contributing

positively to improve the quality of human resources for Vietnam.

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