

Research Article

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Author for correspondence:

Tan Dat Truong

 truongtandat@dthu.edu.vn

 Dong Thap University, Dong Thap Province, Vietnam



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Factors Determining Governance Effectiveness in Vietnamese Universities: A Mixed-Method Investigation

Tan Dat Truong 

Abstract

Background/Purpose. In the context of higher education being strongly influenced by globalization, the knowledge economy, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, university governance effectiveness has become a central issue in many countries, including Vietnam. This study aims to identify and measure the factors influencing governance effectiveness in Vietnamese universities, addressing the gap in large-scale empirical research within the domestic context.

Materials/Methods. A mixed-methods approach employing a convergent parallel design was adopted, combining a survey of 455 administrators, faculty members, and staff from various types of higher education institutions with 15 in-depth interviews. Quantitative analyses (Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.89 to 0.92, EFA, ANOVA, and multiple linear regression) and qualitative analyses (thematic analysis) were conducted independently and later integrated during the discussion phase.

Results. The findings indicate that leadership competence ($\beta = 0.21$) and the legal-policy framework ($\beta = 0.18$) are the strongest predictors of governance effectiveness, followed by international collaboration ($\beta = 0.14$), infrastructure ($\beta = 0.12$), and organizational culture ($\beta = 0.10$). Financial governance did not show a statistically significant direct effect in the regression model ($\beta = 0.08$, Sig. = 0.070).

Conclusion. This research provides the first large-scale empirical evidence for a multifactor governance model in the Vietnamese context. The findings offer important implications for macro-level policy reform and institutional strategic development. The main limitations of the study include its cross-sectional design and the use of purposive convenience sampling.

1. Introduction

The global higher education landscape is undergoing a profound transformation driven by forces such as globalization, the knowledge economy, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Mense et al., 2018). In this dynamic and competitive environment, universities are no longer mere “ivory towers” of knowledge but have evolved into complex organizations. They face increasing pressures for efficiency, accountability, and adaptability (Shattock, 2013).

To respond to these challenges, many countries have implemented extensive higher education governance reforms inspired by the principles of New Public Management (NPM). This approach emphasizes applying private-sector management mechanisms to the public sector, focusing on outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and granting greater autonomy to institutions (Christopher & Leung, 2015).

As a result, performance measurement and management systems have emerged and become widespread in universities (Angiola et al., 2018; Steccolini et al., 2020). Tools such as performance-based funding, research assessment exercises, and university rankings have become integral to the governance of modern higher education institutions (Dougherty & Natow, 2020). Empirical studies in various countries have demonstrated significant diversity in the adoption and impact of these models. For example, Agasisti and Shibanova (2022) examined the relationship between actual autonomy and university performance in Russia, while Andersson and Sund (2022) evaluated the technical efficiency of higher education institutions in Nordic countries. In Australia and the United Kingdom, performance evaluation systems have significantly reshaped academic culture and institutional strategies (Guthrie et al., 2022; Martin-Sardesai et al., 2017a).

However, the implementation of these management tools has not been without controversy. A growing body of critical scholarship has highlighted the unintended consequences of the “corporatisation” of universities (Gebreiter, 2022). Pressures arising from the “publish-or-perish” culture and the obsession with journal rankings have negatively affected academic freedom, creativity, and even scholars’ sense of identity (Becker & Lukka, 2023; Argento & van Helden, 2023). Academics often face conflicts between traditional academic logic and the increasingly dominant managerial logic, creating tensions in the workplace (Kallio et al., 2021).

Vietnam’s higher education system is no exception to this global trend. The country is undergoing a fundamental and comprehensive reform inspired by Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (2013). The Vietnamese government has identified improving higher education governance, promoting institutional autonomy, and advancing international integration as strategic priorities, particularly in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (The Politburo..., 2019).

At the heart of this reform lies university autonomy, a topic that has attracted significant attention from both researchers and policymakers in Vietnam (Dao, 2020; Le, 2021). Autonomy is expected to provide a solid legal framework that enables universities to maximize internal resources while exercising greater flexibility and creativity in education, scientific research, and international collaboration (Salmi & Ly, 2019).

Several studies in Vietnam have examined global governance models to draw lessons for local practices (Bui, 2024; Pham et al., 2019), proposed governance solutions based on quality assurance approaches (Nguyen & Vu, 2017), and identified the key components of governance in public universities (Pham & Dinh, 2023). These works have laid a theoretical foundation and provided an overview of the current governance landscape in Vietnamese higher education (Nguyen, 2024; Truong et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, a significant research gap remains. Most previous studies have been descriptive, policy-oriented, or theoretical in nature. There is still a lack of large-scale empirical research using primary data to systematically identify and measure the simultaneous effects of multiple factors on university governance performance. This gap is particularly evident from the perspective of internal stakeholders such as leaders, faculty, and administrators.

Understanding which factors, such as leadership capacity, legal frameworks, infrastructure, organizational culture, financial governance, or international cooperation, play a decisive role and how they influence governance success is crucial. Such insights will provide scientific evidence to inform macro-level policymaking and institutional development strategies.

Therefore, this study was conducted to address the aforementioned research gap. It aims to answer two central research questions:

- (1) What factors influence governance effectiveness in Vietnamese universities?
- (2) To what extent does each factor affect governance effectiveness?

To answer these questions, the study conducted a large-scale survey across diverse types of higher education institutions and geographical regions in Vietnam. The findings are expected not only to enrich the theoretical foundation of university governance but also to provide valuable empirical evidence to support the Ministry of Education and Training and higher education institutions in designing policies, strategic plans, and governance solutions aligned with the Vietnamese context.

2. Literature Review

Higher education institutions worldwide operate in environments shaped by complex factors and rising societal expectations (Mense et al., 2018). Within this context, university governance, defined as the system of structures, processes, and mechanisms established to guide, manage, and control an academic organization (Kezar & Eckel, 2004; Dobbins & Jungblut, 2018), has become the focal point of reform efforts. Observations from previous studies reveal a distinct shift from traditional collegial governance toward more managerial and corporate models that emphasize efficiency and outcomes (Shattock, 2013). The theoretical foundation underlying this transformation is New Public Management (NPM) (Christopher & Leung, 2015), which has reshaped the role of the state (Han & Xu, 2019) and has been extensively analyzed in systematic reviews (Massaro et al., 2016; Grossi et al., 2023; Guthrie et al., 2019).

To analyze the factors influencing governance effectiveness, this review is structured across three levels: macro-level policy factors, meso-level systems and resources, and micro-level institutional capacities.

2.1. Macro-Level Factors

University operations are directly governed by national policy and legal frameworks. Recent global reports, such as the OECD Education at a Glance 2024 (OECD, 2024) and the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2023 (UNESCO, 2023), emphasize that an enabling policy environment is a precondition for effective higher education governance (Broucker et al., 2021).

A central policy orientation in global reform agendas is the enhancement of university autonomy. Autonomy is regarded as a vital mechanism for promoting institutional flexibility, creativity, and operational efficiency. The relationship between autonomy and performance has been empirically validated in various contexts, including studies conducted in Russia (Agasisti & Shibanova, 2022), analyses of technical efficiency in Nordic countries (Andersson & Sund, 2022), and objective performance evaluation models (Kumar & Thakur, 2019).

To regulate the operations of autonomous institutions, governments have increasingly introduced financial and market-based steering mechanisms. Performance-based funding has become a widely adopted instrument, linking the allocation of public resources directly to quantifiable performance indicators (Dougherty & Natow, 2020). This mechanism has been broadly implemented across Europe, intensifying competition among universities (Teixeira et al., 2021) and influencing key institutional decisions, such as recruitment policies in Italy (Fadda et al., 2021). Meanwhile, external accreditation and quality assurance systems, sometimes functioning as forms of inspection (Wilkins, 2015), have been strengthened to ensure institutional accountability (Rana et al., 2022).

In Vietnam, this trajectory has unfolded through a strategic and consistent reform roadmap, beginning with Government Resolution No. 14/2005/NQ-CP (Government..., 2005), established as a central mission in Party Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW (Central Committee..., 2013), and further consolidated through policies aligned with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Prime Minister..., 2017; Politburo..., 2019). University autonomy has become the core orientation and has been extensively analyzed in academic research (Dao, 2020; Tran, 2018). Domestic scholars have conducted comparative studies of international experiences (Pham, 2009; Bui, 2024; Pham et al., 2019) and proposed governance models adapted to the Vietnamese context (Le, 2021; Le & Do, 2019).

2.2. Meso-Level Factors

To meet emerging demands, universities increasingly employ performance measurement and management systems (PMS) (Arnaboldi & Azzone, 2010; Angiola et al., 2018). These systems are central to contemporary public governance (Steccolini et al., 2020) and utilize tools such as the Balanced Scorecard (Camilleri, 2021) and management control mechanisms (Heinicke & Guenther, 2020) to translate strategic goals into measurable performance indicators. Such practices have been documented in France (Boitier & Rivière, 2013), New Zealand (Narayan, 2020), and the United Kingdom (Hutaibat et al., 2021).

However, a significant body of critical literature has pointed out the unintended consequences of these developments. The emergence of “calculative regimes” (Habersam et al., 2021) and the reliance on digitalized metrics (Mauro et al., 2024) can lead to disillusionment with actual performance improvements (Argento et al., 2020) or even produce distorted outcomes (Kure et al., 2021). Many analyses have shown that PMS often exhibit ambiguity and fail to achieve their intended goals (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020). The rise of the “publish-or-perish” culture (Becker & Lukka, 2023) and the excessive focus on journal rankings (Brooks et al., 2023) have created substantial pressures, reshaping the professional identity of academics (Argento & van Helden, 2023) and restricting their academic freedom (Ramassa et al., 2023). These phenomena have contributed to the corporatisation of higher education (Gebreiter, 2022) and intensified tensions between managerial and academic logics (Kallio et al., 2021). Diverse control mechanisms (Gerdin & Englund, 2022) have been shown to erode both autonomy and job satisfaction (Englund & Gerdin, 2020; Kenny, 2018). The national research assessment exercises (RAEs) in Australia and the UK exemplify this dynamic, driving profound organizational change (Martin-Sardesai et al., 2017b), prompting resistance (Chatterjee et al., 2020), and sparking debates on academic freedom (Martin-Sardesai et al., 2017a).

The effectiveness of governance also depends on institutional resources and capabilities. Organizational culture provides the foundation that shapes the effectiveness of all governance processes. A supportive work environment (Foy et al., 2019), combined with a fair performance evaluation system (Kivipõld et al., 2021), is crucial. The competencies of middle managers and the organization’s adaptability are strongly correlated with overall performance (Sukoco et al., 2021). Moreover, incentive policies must balance financial rewards and intrinsic motivation (Kim & Bak, 2020).

Infrastructure, both physical and technological, provides the operational base for innovation (Ardito et al., 2015) and the implementation of management information systems (Do, 2014). Among these, intellectual capital has been identified as the most strategic asset (Bisogno et al., 2018; Secundo et al., 2023). Empirical evidence from Colombia (Cricelli et al., 2018) and Italy (Esposito et al., 2013) confirms a positive correlation between intellectual capital and university performance. Emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) are also projected to drive major transformations in governance and education (Truong et al., 2024; Le, 2025).

2.3. Micro-Level Factors

At the micro (institutional) level, specific competencies serve as critical determinants. Leadership capacity and the strategic vision of senior management play decisive roles in shaping and guiding institutional performance. The ability to formulate and communicate an inspiring strategic vision (Kantabutra, 2010), combined with effective leadership styles (Salazar-Rebaza et al., 2022), is essential for quality management (Parvin, 2019).

University autonomy also demands professional financial governance, including adopting responsibility center management models (Rigby et al., 2021) and efficient budgeting processes (Jalali Aliabadi et al., 2021). Many public universities, particularly in Australia, have faced challenges stemming from unsustainable commercial business models, necessitating restructuring (Guthrie et al., 2022).

In the context of globalization, internationalization has become a strategic imperative for enhancing competitiveness. This activity should be evaluated using clear indicators (Gao, 2018) and pursued through diverse models, including public–private partnerships (Martinez & Lopez, 2021). For Vietnam, adopting internationalization practices is a strategic priority (Tran et al., 2021). Internationalization is closely linked to strengthening internal quality assurance systems. The quality-assurance-oriented governance approach enables universities to systematize operations in accordance with international standards (Nguyen & Vu, 2017; Dinh & Pham, 2017).

Academic literature underscores that university governance is a multidimensional construct, in which effectiveness results from the complex interaction of factors across multiple levels (Mattei et al., 2021; Dumay et al., 2018; Martin-Sardesai & Guthrie, 2021; Mauro et al., 2017). In Vietnam, existing studies have identified governance components (Pham & Dinh, 2023; Truong et al., 2024), analyzed the current situation (Nguyen, 2024), and discussed conceptual models (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2013; Martin-Sardesai et al., 2020). However, a significant research gap remains: the lack of a large-scale quantitative empirical study capable of constructing and validating an integrated multi-factor governance model suited to Vietnam’s specific higher education context.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed methods approach, a well-established paradigm in the social sciences recognized for its ability to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of complex phenomena. According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), mixed methods research is a design in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and integrates both quantitative and qualitative data within a single study to conclude.

The rationale for adopting this approach lies in the complementarity of the two methods: quantitative methods identify correlations and overall trends, whereas qualitative methods offer depth and contextual understanding. When combined, they allow the study to capture generalizable patterns while simultaneously interpreting the meanings and motivations underlying participants’ responses, thereby enhancing the validity and interpretive power of the findings.

3.1. Research Design

The study follows a convergent parallel design, one of the most widely used forms of mixed methods research (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). In this design, the quantitative and qualitative components are conducted concurrently and independently, and their results are integrated at the final stage of analysis through triangulation.

- The quantitative component focuses on collecting large-scale survey data to determine the relationships among variables and the degree of influence of each factor in university governance.

- The qualitative component involves semi-structured interviews to explore the underlying factors, experiences, perspectives, and rationales of participants that help explain the quantitative results.

Data integration follows a narrative integration strategy, where the two strands are presented in parallel: each quantitative finding is supported and interpreted with corresponding qualitative evidence, thereby enhancing analytical depth and persuasiveness (Caracelli & Greene, 1993).

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

3.2.1. Quantitative Data

An online questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical framework of modern university governance, comprising the following sections:

(i) demographic and professional information; (ii) measurement scales on leadership capacity, policy, finance, infrastructure, organizational culture, and international cooperation. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 - *Strongly disagree* to 5 - *Strongly agree*).

Prior to full implementation, a pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to verify clarity and content validity. After necessary adjustments, the official survey was distributed to staff, faculty, and administrators at various Vietnamese universities, yielding 455 valid responses (N = 455).

A purposive convenience sampling method was employed to ensure diversity in positions, institutional types, scales, and geographical regions. Although non-probabilistic, this sampling strategy is appropriate for exploratory research and is generally accepted as providing reasonable representativeness.

Table 1. Distribution of Survey Sample by Personal and Professional Characteristics (N = 455)

Characteristic	Subgroup	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	255	56.0
	Female	200	44.0
Age	Under 30	90	19.8
	30-40	170	37.4
	41-50	130	28.6
	Over 50	65	14.2
	Education level	Bachelor's	60
	Master's	170	37.4
	Doctorate	160	35.2

Characteristic	Subgroup	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Position	Associate/Full Professor	65	14.2
	University Leadership	20	4.4
	Faculty/Department/Unit Leadership	55	12.1
	Lecturer	275	60.4
	Officer/Staff	105	23.1
Type of university	Public	320	70.3
	Private	95	20.9
Student enrollment	International/Foreign-affiliated	40	8.8
	Under 5,000	100	22.0
	5,000-10,000	160	35.2
	10,001-20,000	120	26.4
	Over 20,000	75	16.5
Region	Northern Vietnam	160	35.2
	Central-Highlands	85	18.7
	Southern Vietnam	210	46.1
Governance involvement	Frequent	230	50.5
	Occasional	150	33.0
	Rare/Never	75	16.5

3.2.2. Qualitative Data

The qualitative strand was collected through 15 semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interview guide covered six thematic areas: leadership, policy, finance, infrastructure, organizational culture, and international cooperation.

Participants were purposefully selected from among survey respondents to maximize diversity in roles, experience, and institutional contexts, ensuring the inclusion of multiple perspectives. The number of interviews was determined by theoretical saturation, when no new themes or insights emerged (King, Keohane & Verba, 1994).

3.3. Instruments and Data Analysis Methods

3.3.1. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were processed using SPSS version 26 through a multi-step procedure:

1. Descriptive statistics - describing sample characteristics and mean distributions of variables;
2. Reliability testing - using Cronbach's Alpha (ranging from 0.89 to 0.92, indicating high internal consistency);

3. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) - to verify construct validity of the measurement scales;
4. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) - to test differences across demographic groups;
5. Multiple Linear Regression - to determine the degree of influence of each factor on the dependent variable.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha of Scales

Factor Group	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Item-Total Correlation
Leadership	6	0.91	0.65-0.82
Policy-Legal	7	0.89	0.62-0.80
Facilities	6	0.90	0.64-0.81
Organizational Culture	6	0.92	0.66-0.83
Finance	6	0.91	0.63-0.82
Internationalization	6	0.90	0.61-0.79

3.3.2. Qualitative Analysis

Interview transcripts were verbatim transcribed and analyzed using the thematic analysis approach, consisting of three stages:

1. Open coding - identifying and labeling initial meanings;
2. Axial coding - grouping codes into conceptual categories;
3. Selective coding - synthesizing core themes that capture participants' experiences.

NVivo 12 software was used to manage, organize, and trace the entire coding process, ensuring transparency and auditability (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2010).

3.4. Interpretation of Findings

In the final phase, both data sets were integrated and interpreted through thematic convergence. Each quantitative finding was cross-validated with corresponding qualitative evidence to:

- Add depth to statistical results by elucidating underlying relationships;
- Confirm and generalize personal narratives, thereby enhancing the consistency and explanatory strength of the study.

This integrative approach ensures that findings go beyond mere description, illuminating the mechanisms and contextual dynamics that a single-method design could not fully capture.

3.5. Research Ethics

All ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam, pursuant to Decree No. 262/2025/NĐ-CP dated October 14, 2025, which provides detailed guidance on the implementation of the Law on Science, Technology, and Innovation.

Before the survey and interviews, all participants were fully informed about the objectives, procedures, benefits, and responsibilities of participation. Written informed consent was obtained

voluntarily from every participant. All data were coded, anonymized, and securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

Every stage of data collection, storage, and analysis adhered to the highest standards of scientific integrity, professional ethics, and data protection as stipulated by the Ministry of Science and Technology.

4. Research Results

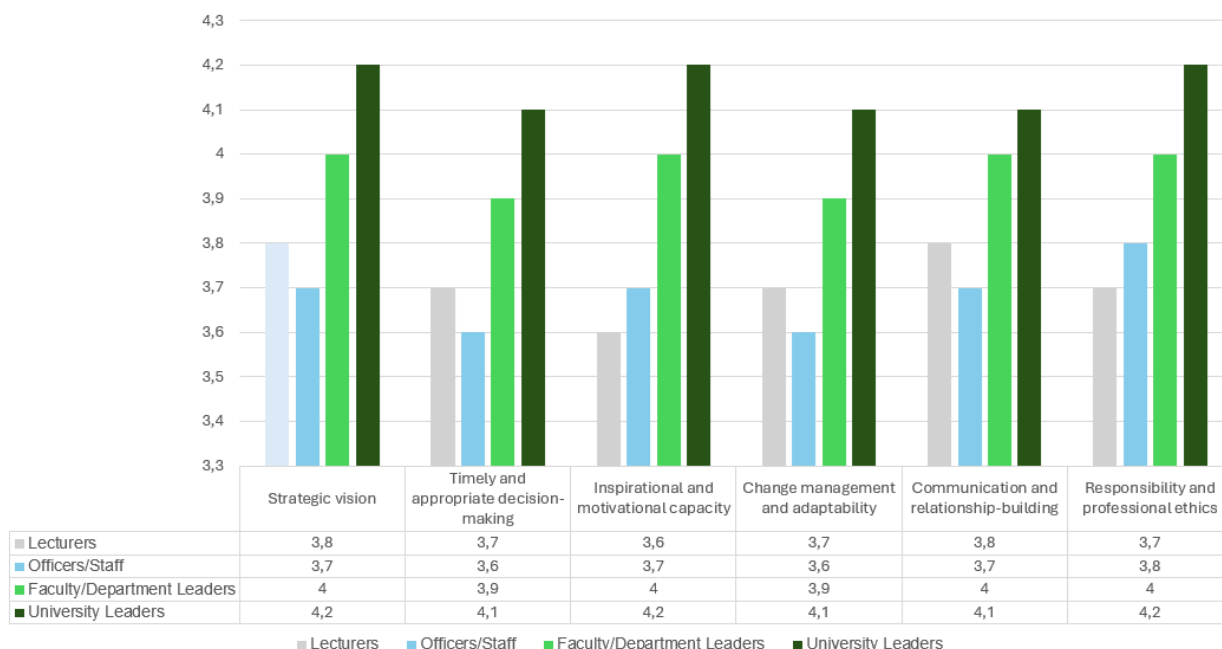


Figure 1. Leadership Competency Factors by Position

Figure 1 illustrates clear differences in perceptions of leadership competencies, with statistically significant disparities across positional groups ($p < 0.05$ for all criteria). A consistent pattern emerges: the level of positive evaluation increases in accordance with hierarchical position within the organization. At the staff level, Lecturers and Officers/Staff reported the lowest assessments (mean scores $\approx 3.6-3.8$). By contrast, Faculty/Department Leaders demonstrated a markedly more positive perspective (mean scores ≈ 4.0). At the highest level, University Leaders provided uniformly strong and positive evaluations (mean scores $\approx 4.1-4.2$). The most pronounced divergence in perception appeared in the assessment of “Strategic Vision” ($p = 0.002$). Overall, the results not only quantify a perceptual gap but also demonstrate that judgments of leadership competency are strongly associated with individuals’ positions and roles within the organizational hierarchy.

Table 3. Policy and Legal Framework Factors (by Type of University)

Item	Public		Private		International		Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Regulations on higher education are clear and stable	3.6	1.0	3.8	0.9	4.0	0.8	0.008**
Government agencies provide timely and adequate support	3.5	1.0	3.7	0.9	3.9	0.8	0.020*
The autonomy mechanism provides a solid framework for governance	3.7	1.0	3.9	0.9	4.1	0.7	0.012*

Item	Public		Private		International		Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Universities can easily access public budget resources for teaching and research	3.6	1.0	3.8	0.9	4.0	0.8	0.018*
Universities have flexible mechanisms to quickly implement new policies	3.5	1.1	3.7	0.9	4.0	0.7	0.025*
External accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms help improve governance	3.6	1.0	3.8	0.9	4.1	0.8	0.014*
Universities effectively utilize the legal framework to strengthen international cooperation	3.7	0.9	3.8	0.9	4.1	0.7	0.016*

Table 3 shows statistically significant differences among public, private, and international universities in their evaluations of the impact of policy and legal frameworks (all Sig. values < 0.05). A consistent trend is observed across all items: international universities provided the most positive evaluations, followed by private universities, while public universities reported the lowest scores. Specifically, the mean scores of international universities ranged from 3.9 to 4.1, indicating a higher level of satisfaction with the policy environment. In contrast, public universities' mean scores were considerably lower, ranging from 3.5 to 3.7. The most notable divergence appeared in the criterion assessing the "clarity and stability of higher education regulations" (Sig. = 0.008). These results suggest that the type of university is a critical factor influencing how institutions perceive and benefit from the existing legal and policy environment.

Table 4. Facilities and Technical Infrastructure Factors (by Student Enrollment Size)

Item	< 5,000		5,000-10,000		10,001-20,000		> 20,000		Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
The university is equipped with sufficient modern teaching facilities	3.4	1.0	3.6	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.1	0.7	0.001**
Learning management systems (LMS, ERP) operate reliably and are user-friendly	3.5	1.0	3.7	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.0	0.7	0.014*
Internal networks and data security systems are safe	3.6	0.9	3.7	0.9	4.0	0.8	4.1	0.7	0.009**
Laboratories and libraries are regularly maintained and updated	3.5	1.0	3.6	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.0	0.7	0.011*
Working conditions (offices, meeting rooms, etc.) are adequate	3.6	0.9	3.7	0.9	4.0	0.8	4.1	0.7	0.013*
The university has plans to upgrade and expand its infrastructure in the future	3.5	1.0	3.7	0.9	4.0	0.7	4.1	0.7	0.015*

The ANOVA results in Table 4 reveal statistically significant differences in the evaluation of facilities and technical infrastructure across universities of different student enrollment sizes (all Sig. values < 0.05). The data indicate a clear positive relationship: the larger the student body, the more favorable the evaluations of facilities and infrastructure. Specifically, universities with the smallest enrollment (< 5,000 students) consistently received the lowest mean scores across all items (ranging from 3.4 to 3.6). In contrast, universities with the largest enrollment (> 20,000 students) achieved the highest evaluations (ranging from 4.0 to 4.1), reflecting a markedly higher level of satisfaction. The most pronounced difference was observed in the criterion “The university is equipped with sufficient modern teaching facilities” (Sig. = 0.001). Overall, these findings suggest that institutional size is a critical factor directly associated with faculty and staff perceptions of the adequacy and quality of facilities and technical infrastructure supporting academic activities.

Table 5. Organizational Culture and Work Environment Factors (by Level of Governance Participation)

Item	Frequent		Occasional		Rare/Never		Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Relationships among units within the university reflect cohesion and mutual support	3.9	0.8	3.6	0.9	3.4	1.0	0.003**
A culture of collaboration and information sharing is consistently maintained	3.8	0.9	3.6	0.9	3.5	1.0	0.012*
Incentive policies encourage faculty creativity and contributions	3.7	0.9	3.5	1.0	3.3	1.1	0.015*
The work environment is open, encouraging dialogue and critical discussion	3.9	0.8	3.6	0.9	3.4	1.0	0.004**
Internal training programs enhance professional capacity	3.8	0.9	3.6	0.9	3.5	1.0	0.021*
A culture of responsibility and compliance with regulations is strictly enforced	3.9	0.8	3.7	0.9	3.5	1.0	0.010*

The analysis in Table 5 shows that the level of participation in governance activities is significantly associated with perceptions of organizational culture and the work environment (all Sig. values < 0.05). The data reveal a clear positive relationship: individuals who frequently participate in governance tend to provide much more favorable evaluations than those with little or no participation. Specifically, the frequent participation group consistently reported higher mean scores (3.7-3.9), while the rare/never participation group reported the lowest scores (3.3-3.5). The most pronounced differences appeared in the criteria “cohesion and mutual support among units” (Sig. = 0.003) and “an open work environment that encourages dialogue” (Sig. = 0.004). These findings suggest that active engagement in governance processes is a critical factor linked to individuals’ positive perceptions of the overall culture and work environment within universities.

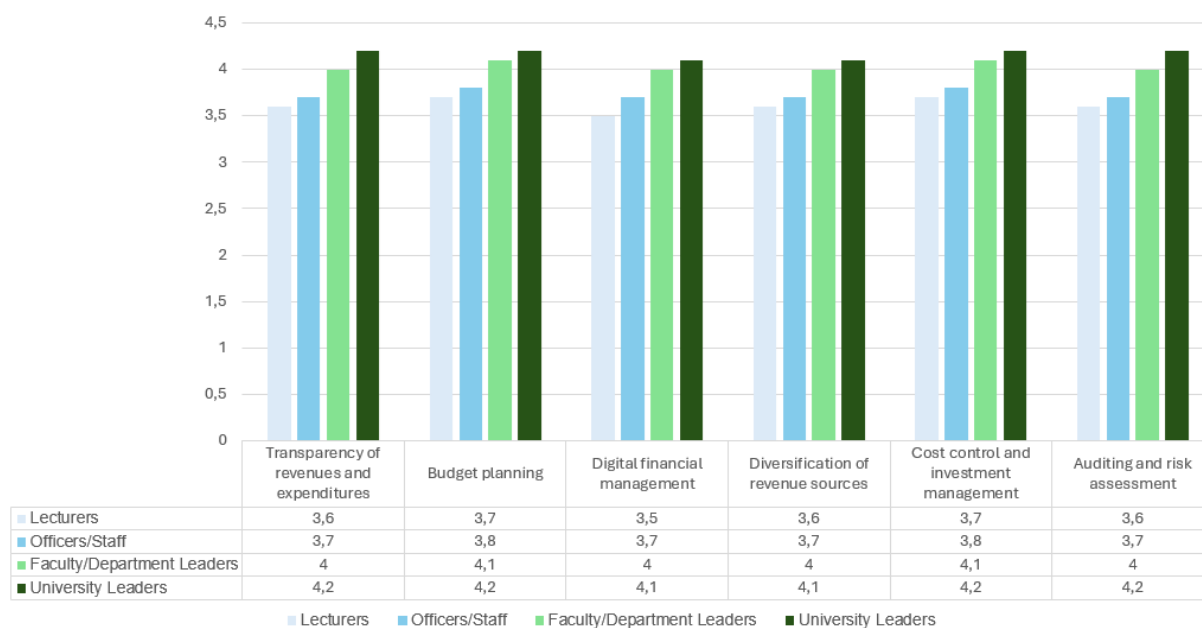


Figure 2. Financial Governance Factors (by Position)

Figure 2 indicates highly significant differences in the evaluation of financial governance across different positional groups (all Sig. values < 0.05). The data reveal a consistent pattern: the level of positive assessment increases with organizational rank. University Leaders expressed the most favorable evaluations, followed by Faculty/Department Leaders, while Lecturers and Officers/Staff provided considerably lower ratings. Specifically, the mean scores for senior leadership consistently ranged from 4.1 to 4.2, whereas those for lecturers and staff ranged from 3.5 to 3.8. The most pronounced divergence appeared in the criterion “clarity and effectiveness of the budget planning process” (Sig. = 0.002). These results confirm that position within the institution is a critical factor, closely associated with individuals’ perceptions of and confidence in the transparency and effectiveness of financial governance in universities.

Table 6. Evaluation of International Cooperation and Development (by Educational Level)

Item	Bachelor’s		Master’s		Doctorate		Assoc./Full Prof.		Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
The university develops effective strategies to attract international faculty and PhD students	3.4	1.0	3.6	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.1	0.7	0.002**
The university establishes sustainable joint training programs with foreign institutions	3.5	1.0	3.7	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.2	0.7	0.004**
The university supports students in participating in	3.4	1.0	3.6	0.9	3.8	0.8	4.1	0.7	0.010*

Item	Bachelor's		Master's		Doctorate		Assoc./Full Prof.		Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
international exchange and internship programs									
The university actively engages in international research projects and publications	3.5	0.9	3.7	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.2	0.7	0.003**
The university applies international quality accreditation standards	3.4	1.0	3.6	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.1	0.7	0.006**
The university systematically develops a global branding strategy	3.5	0.9	3.7	0.9	3.9	0.8	4.2	0.7	0.008**

The analysis in Table 6 shows that educational level is highly significantly associated with perceptions of international cooperation and development (all Sig. values < 0.05). The data demonstrate a clear positive relationship: individuals with higher educational attainment tend to evaluate the university's internationalization efforts more positively. Specifically, the Bachelor's group consistently reported the lowest mean scores (3.4-3.5), whereas the Associate/Full Professor group provided the highest evaluations (4.1-4.2). The most pronounced difference was observed in the item "developing effective strategies to attract international faculty and PhD students" (Sig. = 0.002). These findings suggest that educational level is a critical factor, influencing individuals' perceptions and evaluations of the scope and effectiveness of universities' international cooperation and development initiatives.

Table 7. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Factor	No. of Items	Factor Loadings	% Variance Explained
Leadership	6	0.65 - 0.82	15.5%
Policy	7	0.61 - 0.80	30.1%
Facilities	6	0.63 - 0.81	45.3%
Organizational Culture	6	0.67 - 0.84	60.4%
Finance	6	0.64 - 0.82	73.8%
International Cooperation	6	0.62 - 0.80	85.2%

The results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) presented in Table 7 indicate that six principal factors were extracted from the observed variables, consistent with the study's theoretical framework. All factor loadings were high, ranging from 0.61 to 0.84, exceeding the acceptable

threshold of 0.50. This confirms that the measurement scales achieved convergent validity, meaning the items effectively measure the constructs they represent. The total variance explained by the six factors was 85.2%, a very high value, indicating that the six-factor model accounts for the majority of the variance in the original dataset. These findings provide strong evidence for the validity of the measurement structure and confirm that the model is suitable for subsequent statistical analyses such as regression.

Table 8. Multiple Linear Regression

Independent Variable	β Coefficient	Sig.
Leadership	0.21	0.001**
Policy-Legal	0.18	0.004**
Facilities	0.12	0.030*
Organizational Culture	0.10	0.042*
Finance	0.08	0.070
International Cooperation	0.14	0.012*

The results of the multiple linear regression analysis in Table 8, conducted to identify factors influencing university development, show that five of the six independent variables exerted positive and statistically significant effects. Among them, Leadership emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Policy-Legal framework ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$) and International Cooperation ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$). The factors Facilities ($\beta = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$) and Organizational Culture ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$) also showed significant but weaker effects. Notably, the Finance factor ($\beta = 0.08$, Sig. = 0.070) did not exhibit a statistically significant impact when considered simultaneously with other variables. These results suggest that leadership capacity and the policy-legal environment are the two most critical predictors of governance effectiveness. In contrast, although important, financial governance does not demonstrate a direct, statistically significant effect in this overall model.

Table 9. Results of Qualitative Analysis

Open Coding (Level 1)	Axial Coding (Level 2)	Selective Coding (Core Theme)	Illustrative Quote
"Leaders have long-term vision but sometimes make decisions slowly."	Decision-making capacity	Leadership competency	"The university leadership provides good direction, but in some situations, they need to make decisions faster to avoid missing opportunities." (P1 - Lecturer)
"Autonomy policies allow the university to be more proactive in admissions."	Policy impact	Legal & policy framework	"The autonomy mechanism creates favorable conditions, but there are still many cumbersome procedures from the authorities." (P3 - Faculty Leader)

Open Coding (Level 1)	Axial Coding (Level 2)	Selective Coding (Core Theme)	Illustrative Quote
“Many laboratory devices are outdated and need upgrading.”	Facilities for teaching and research	Facilities	“The university has labs, but much of the equipment is obsolete, affecting research.” (P6 - Researcher)
“The university culture encourages exchange, but some remain hesitant.”	Culture of sharing and debate	Organizational culture	“Meetings are open, but some people are still reluctant to voice opposing opinions.” (P9 - Administrative Officer)
“Transparent financial reporting makes us feel more assured.”	Financial transparency	Financial governance	“Financial information is clear and accessible, but reporting should be improved to be faster.” (P12 - Lecturer)
“The university has engaged in extensive international cooperation, with students participating in exchange programs.”	Academic and student cooperation	International cooperation & development	“Last year, my department had five students participate in exchange programs in South Korea, which was a real strength.” (P14 - Department Head)

The qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews, summarized in Table 9, provides detailed insights that clarify and enrich the quantitative findings. Through systematic coding from open coding, to axial coding, to selective coding, six core themes were identified, fully consistent with the six factors extracted from the quantitative analysis. This convergence not only strengthens the validity of the research model but also demonstrates the logical integration of data from two different methodological approaches.

Importantly, the illustrative quotes reveal nuanced and practical aspects that statistical data alone cannot capture, providing the necessary context for a comprehensive interpretation of the results.

In the themes related to direction and structure, *Leadership competency* and *Policy & legal framework* were highlighted with multiple perspectives. Regarding leadership, respondents recognized management's strategic vision but also noted delays in decision-making in some situations. As one lecturer (P1) observed: “*The university leadership provides good direction, but... decisions need to be made faster to avoid missing opportunities.*” For policy, the autonomy mechanism was generally viewed as positive, allowing institutions to become “more proactive.” However, its effectiveness was limited by external administrative barriers, as one faculty leader (P3) noted, citing “*cumbersome procedures from the authorities.*” This illustrates a gap between policy intentions and implementation in practice.

For resource-related themes, *Facilities* and *Financial Governance* were elaborated with specific examples. In terms of facilities, the issue was not a scarcity of equipment but outdated equipment. A researcher (P6) emphasized that “*many machines in the laboratories are obsolete,*” revealing challenges in investment quality and technological renewal, directly *affecting research*. In financial governance, transparency was valued for providing assurance, yet operational efficiency remained

an area for improvement, particularly the need for “*faster reporting*” as pointed out by a lecturer (P12).

In the themes related to environment and people, *Organizational culture* and *International cooperation* also revealed critical details. Concerning culture, there was a discrepancy between policy and practice: while the environment was described as “open,” an administrative officer (P9) noted that some individuals were still hesitant to voice dissenting opinions. This indicates a need for deeper efforts to foster a truly safe environment for dialogue and debate. Finally, the theme of international cooperation was substantiated by concrete examples of success. A department head (P14) highlighted that “*five students went on exchange to South Korea last year,*” offering vivid evidence of the positive impact of internationalization initiatives.

Overall, the qualitative analysis effectively uncovered the *stories behind the numbers*. It not only confirmed the structure of the governance factors but also clarified their strengths, weaknesses, and internal contradictions. By integrating direct quotes and real-world experiences, the study produced a comprehensive, nuanced, and practically relevant portrait of university governance, surpassing what could have been achieved by a single-method approach.

5. Discussion of Results

5.1. Discussion of Main Findings

This study identified the key factors influencing the effectiveness of university governance in Vietnam and highlighted important differences in perception across positions, institutional types, and educational levels.

First, leadership capacity plays a decisive role. Regression analysis revealed leadership as the strongest and most significant predictor, confirming the central role of managerial teams in setting directions and steering universities. This finding aligns with the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which emphasize strong, decisive managerial leadership as the primary driver of organizational performance, in contrast to traditional collegial governance models. Comparative analyses showed a pronounced perception gap: leaders tended to rate this competency far more positively than faculty and administrative staff. This reflects a substantial perception divide. In-depth interviews reinforced this evidence; many faculty members acknowledged that leaders possess “good strategic vision,” but also felt that “decision-making is sometimes slow.” This provides empirical validation that, in the Vietnamese context, managerialism is a key determinant of effective governance, consistent with international research (Salazar-Rebaza et al., 2022; Kantabutra, 2010).

Second, policy and legal frameworks exert a strong yet ambivalent influence, reflecting the core tension in Vietnam’s NPM-inspired reforms. In the regression model, the policy-legal factor ranked second in terms of impact. However, deeper analysis revealed significant variation by institutional type: international universities reported markedly more favorable evaluations than public ones. Interview data echoed this pattern, as participants noted that “autonomy mechanisms create favorable conditions” but often come with “cumbersome administrative procedures.” This finding enriches the literature by empirically demonstrating the “friction” of policy implementation, where NPM’s empowerment objectives (Broucker et al., 2021) are mediated and sometimes hindered by entrenched bureaucratic structures. It is consistent with studies on Vietnam’s transitional governance processes (Dao, 2020; Le, 2021).

Third, infrastructure and international cooperation showed clear positive effects. The results indicate that both factors significantly contribute to university development. Comparative analyses revealed a strong association between institutional size and satisfaction with facilities; larger universities tended to receive higher ratings. Interviews highlighted deficiencies in certain contexts, such as “outdated equipment affecting research.” This study contributes by quantifying the direct

impact of these factors in Vietnam's governance model, supporting the argument that both "hard" resources (Ardito et al., 2015; Cricelli et al., 2018) and "soft" global positioning (Gao, 2018; Tran et al., 2021) are no longer peripheral but central to governance success.

Fourth, organizational culture exhibited a statistically significant yet comparatively weaker influence. However, perception differences were notable: individuals who regularly engaged in governance activities rated organizational culture far more positively than those with limited or no involvement. Interview data also reflected this inconsistency; while the environment was often described as "open," some participants admitted feeling "hesitant to express differing opinions." The key contribution of this finding lies in exposing perceptual differences based on governance participation levels. It suggests that while NPM-style reforms may be implemented top-down, their effects are not uniformly perceived, and a collaborative culture (Kivipõld et al., 2021) has yet to permeate throughout all organizational levels.

Fifth, financial governance did not show a statistically significant direct effect in this model, but plays a foundational role. This nuanced finding requires careful theoretical interpretation. Although NPM frameworks place strong emphasis on financial mechanisms (Rigby et al., 2021), this result does not imply that finance is unimportant. Rather, as qualitative evidence emphasized financial transparency "makes staff feel more secure," its role may be foundational rather than directional. This study posits that financial governance may act as an intervening or antecedent variable. Poor financial management almost certainly constrains governance effectiveness, but transparent financial practices (Nguyen, 2024) may not directly drive development; instead, they foster trust, thereby indirectly reinforcing organizational culture and leadership effectiveness. This finding is particularly valuable, suggesting that in the Vietnamese context, financial transparency functions as a "hygiene factor," a prerequisite for stability rather than a direct catalyst for growth, unlike leadership capacity.

In summary, these findings present a clear picture of a governance model in transition, reflecting the adaptation of NPM principles. The effectiveness of university governance in Vietnam is primarily shaped by managerial (leadership) and structural (policy-legal) factors, while infrastructure, organizational culture, and international cooperation play supportive roles. The perceptual gaps and the indirect role of finance underscore a critical challenge in implementing these reforms: achieving organizational consensus and moving beyond basic stability toward deep, comprehensive transformation.

5.2. Implications for Managers and Policymakers

5.2.1. For Policymakers (Ministry of Education and Training, Government)

First, it is essential to further improve the legal framework for university autonomy to enhance substantive autonomy while minimizing bureaucratic barriers. The study shows that policy exerts a major impact, but the complexity of implementation reduces its effectiveness. A comprehensive review of relevant circulars and decrees is therefore needed to eliminate overlapping and outdated regulations and to develop detailed, clear, and consistent guidelines, particularly in areas of financial management, asset management, investment, and human resources.

Second, targeted support policies should be developed for smaller universities and institutions in disadvantaged regions. The significant disparities in facilities between universities highlight the risk of growing inequality within the system. Such policies could include conditional infrastructure investment packages, capacity-building programs for staff, and initiatives that encourage partnerships between larger and smaller universities.

Third, a stronger mechanism is required to ensure that university autonomy is effectively implemented, striking a balance between autonomy and accountability. Establishing maturity

indicators for universities in the autonomy process should serve as criteria for transparent and equitable allocation of resources.

5.2.2. For University Leaders

First, the highest priority should be investing in the development of leadership and managerial competencies at all levels. Since leadership is the most influential factor, training and professional development programs in strategic governance, change management, decision-making, and communication should be implemented systematically and regularly.

Second, universities should proactively establish effective mechanisms for dialogue and internal communication to bridge perception gaps between leadership and staff. Transparency in information, especially regarding finances and key decisions, together with forums for listening to and incorporating feedback, will help build organizational consensus and strengthen trust.

Third, long-term strategies with clear roadmaps are needed to upgrade facilities and expand international cooperation, as these two factors demonstrated clear positive effects. Instead of spreading investments thinly, universities should identify priority areas for concentrated resource allocation and actively seek external cooperation opportunities and funding to achieve these goals.

5.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite achieving its objectives, this study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, because a cross-sectional design was used, the findings reflect correlations at a single point in time and do not provide sufficient evidence to establish causal relationships among the factors. Second, the use of purposive convenience sampling, despite efforts to ensure diversity, may limit the generalizability of the results across the entire higher education system. Third, the study treated universities as unified entities and did not examine variations in governance models and influencing factors across different disciplinary clusters, such as natural sciences, social sciences, engineering, or economics.

Building on these limitations, several directions for future research can be suggested to deepen this line of inquiry. First, longitudinal studies are needed to track changes in governance factors and their effectiveness over time, thereby allowing more robust conclusions about causality. Second, future research should employ stratified random sampling to enhance the representativeness and generalizability of findings. Third, more in-depth studies should compare governance models and context-specific factors across disciplinary clusters. Finally, more sophisticated analytical models could be developed to explore the mediating or moderating roles of variables such as organizational culture or employee commitment in the relationship between leadership capacity and institutional effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

This study systematically examined the key factors influencing the effectiveness of university governance in Vietnam through a mixed-methods approach. The findings confirm that leadership capacity and policy legal frameworks are the two strongest predictors. Factors such as international cooperation, infrastructure, and organizational culture also demonstrate important supportive effects, while financial governance functions as a foundational factor rather than a direct driver within the overall model.

The main contribution of this research lies in providing one of the first large-scale empirical evidences validating a multi-factor governance model in the context of Vietnamese higher education. By clarifying these core dynamics, the study offers critical insights for macro-level policymakers in refining the legal framework for university autonomy, while also supporting university leaders in

prioritizing strategies to enhance managerial capacity, upgrade infrastructure, and promote internationalization.

Declarations

Funding. This research received no external funding.

Ethical Approval. The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. It was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Science and Technology of Vietnam, in compliance with the provisions of Decree No. 262/2025/NĐ-CP dated October 14, 2025, of the Government, which provides detailed regulations and guidelines for the implementation of several articles of the Law on Science, Technology, and Innovation in Vietnam.

Informed Consent Statement. Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement. Research data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, with restrictions due to ethical and privacy considerations.

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About the Contributor(s)

Truong Tan Dat, is a Lecturer at Dong Thap University, Vietnam. His research interests include resource development management, human resource management in educational institutions, education quality assurance, teacher professional development, state management in education, and innovative teaching methods.

Email: truongtandat@dthu.edu.vn

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9719-9484>

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