

# Factors In Staffing Autonomy Affecting Academic Staff Development: A Case Study in University of Education, Vietnam National University Hanoi

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*Abstract:* Staffing autonomy is a fundamental aspect in university autonomy, which represents an inherent characteristic of universities. Since the Doi Moi revolution, Vietnam has piloted to grant higher autonomy to universities, including staffing autonomy, to reform the higher education system. This study investigated four factors in staffing autonomy affecting the academic staff development in University of Education – Vietnam National University Hanoi (VNU Hanoi), which were autonomy in document development and submission for approval of and report to VNU, autonomy in implementing staff development strategies, autonomy in mechanism and organization, and authority of the Rector. A survey of 106 lecturers of University of Education shows that staffing autonomy has positive impacts on academic staff development. Based on the findings, the research shed light on the relationships between factors in staffing autonomy and academic staff development, which contributes to making plans and strategies for efficiency enhancement of the university.

*Key-Words:* - University autonomy, staff development, staffing autonomy, university, lecturer, lecturers' standards.

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## 1 Introduction

University autonomy is expected to be a stepping stone for universities towards achieving academic freedom. In recent years, scientists have focused on discussing the concepts and aspects of university autonomy. However, university autonomy is often considered in four aspects including academic, staffing, organizational and financial autonomy, [1], [2], [3]. As one of the four aspects of university autonomy, staffing autonomy is demonstrated through the following criteria: recruitment procedures for senior academic and administrative staff, salaries of senior academic and administrative staff, dismissal of senior academic and administrative staff, and promotion procedures for senior academic and administrative staff.

Vietnam National University Hanoi (VNU Hanoi) has had greater autonomy than other universities in Vietnam's higher education system since 1993, [4]. Enforcing autonomy given by the Government, VNU Hanoi has decentralized its management towards greater autonomy and higher

social accountability in different areas in its member universities, [5], [6].

Established in 1999, the Faculty of Education is a member of VNU Hanoi. In 2009, the Faculty of Education was changed into the University of Education with advanced training models, [7]. Under the proper, effective and unified management and coordination of VNU Hanoi, the university is organized and operated towards great autonomy and social accountability and in an open, transitional and transnational direction. The university also incorporates training and scientific research, promotes effective interdisciplinary collaboration, and makes use of the scientific staff of VNU Hanoi (including the staff in natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, languages, political theories, national defense and physical education, etc.) and technical facilities and infrastructure (for example labs, libraries, dormitory, gyms, yards and information technology infrastructure, etc.). University of Education has been given the right to enforce autonomy, in which staffing autonomy was among the first to be applied, in a specific route by

VNU Hanoi. Enforcing staffing autonomy has contributed to the university's strong growth in its academic staff regarding quantity, structure and quality. Identifying factors in staffing autonomy affecting the development of the academic staff is a serious scientific issue with high practical value.

The paper included five sections. The first section gave an overview of the current situation of university autonomy enforcement in VNU Hanoi in general, and University of Education in particular. Section two introduced the theoretical framework to assess staffing autonomy in university autonomy. Section three presented the methodology of the research. Section four offered the empirical results of the analysis. The final section discussed the results and gave some implication for better staffing autonomy and university autonomy implementation.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 University Autonomy

University autonomy has been proved to play a vital role in the development of universities. It is considered a prerequisite condition allowing academic freedom in universities, [8], [9]. University autonomy also helps universities to perform better in the market economy, especially to experiment with developing public policies, [9], [10]. University autonomy models around the world differ from each other depending on the State's control policies and the complexity of factors in the models, [11], [12], [13]. Several studies have placed their focus on major aspects of university autonomy including academic, staff, organization and finance, [14], [15], [16], [17].

In 2009, European University Association introduced the first version of university autonomy tools, which were amended in 2011 and 2017, [1], [2], [3], including four key areas: academic, organization, staff and finance. The tools not only aim to evaluate the level of autonomy of public universities in EU member states, but also act as criteria for the governments and universities to develop and adjust their policies for tertiary education development in Europe. Moreover, countries outside the EU can use the tools as a basis for constructing their own framework that is in line with their regulations on mechanism and specific development conditions in their countries, [17].

The World Bank presented four university governance models at different autonomy levels: state-control such as in Malaysia, semi-autonomous such as in France and New Zealand, semi-independent such as in Singapore, and independent such as in the UK or Australia, [18]. In the state-control model, tertiary institutions are still autonomous to a certain extent because the States cannot take full control of their operation due to financial and practical reasons. On the other hand, in an independent model, there still exist hidden assumptions on the States' rights in controlling some strategic aspects and requiring accountability at high levels in tertiary institutions, [18].

The Vietnam government has specified the assignment and decentralization of educational management for greater autonomy and accountability in education institutions, [19]. To be more specific, universities are autonomous and held accountable as subjected to the laws and university charter. At the same time, the Government confirmed the importance of completing tertiary education development policies in guaranteeing autonomy and social accountability in tertiary education institutions, government's administration and the society's roles in supervision and evaluation of tertiary education, [20].

The new administration strategies specified that in the renewal of tertiary education administration, the state's administration in education and institutions' administration are the breakthrough points to make comprehensive changes to tertiary education, [21]. One of the urgent tasks given to the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) by the Prime Minister is to review, complement and amend the available legal documents, and to develop new ones on university establishment, admissions, training implementation, financial management, quality management, and recruitment. The documents must clarify lecturers' responsibilities and welfare in training and scientific research, and the relations among Administrators, University council, the Party committee and university unions. This paves the way for universities and colleges to enforce their autonomy and accountability to the society and state as regulated in the Law of Education, [22].

In the initial period, 23 tertiary education institutions were chosen to pilot autonomy enforcement among hundreds of universities and academies nationwide, [23]. Based on the results of the pilot enforcement, the Government had proper

adjustments in making later macro policies on university autonomy.

In Vietnam, the university autonomy trends are closely linked with the State's intervention via its system of Laws and legal documents. Initially, the State (represented by MOET) applied the state-control model, which means tertiary education institutions were operated under the State's tight control in all aspects (organization, apparatus, academic fields, finances, etc.), [24]. However, the State's roles then gradually reduced, which led to a five-level State's intervention in Vietnam's tertiary education system including those with strong intervention, fairly strong intervention, intervention at medium level, little intervention and no intervention. In addition, he also pointed out the autonomous rule in Vietnam which is the inverse correlation between the state's intervention and the universities' autonomy level.

## 2.2 Staffing Autonomy

A previous study presented six elements in university autonomy, one of which was staffing autonomy, [12]. With staffing autonomy, universities have the right to make decisions on employment conditions, salaries, use of human resources, and appointment and dismissal of academic and administrative staff, etc. They also pointed out that staffing autonomy is closely related to other autonomy elements, [1], [2], [3].

As specified by the European University Association, staffing autonomy consists of recruitment procedures for academic staff and senior administrative staff, salaries for senior academic and administrative staff, dismissal procedures for senior academic affairs and administrative staff, and promotion procedures for senior academic affairs and administrative staff, [3].

Pursuant to Vietnam's Law on Education, universities are autonomous in five areas: (1) Development of training program and teaching curriculum and plan, (2) Admissions, training and graduation recognition, (3) Apparatus, Human resources mobilization, management and use, and (5) Domestic and foreign cooperation. Generally, the Law identifies staffing autonomy as a part of university autonomy, [19].

University of Education is a member university in VNU Hanoi which possesses great autonomy, including staffing autonomy. In addition, the university Rector has great authority in staffing

including recruitment, appointment, dismissal, transfer and termination, and staff development planning (quantity, structure and quality). However, in some tasks in staffing, the Rector still has to ask for consensus from VNU Hanoi before implementation and report to VNU Hanoi after completion [25].

## 2.3 Lecturer Development

In tertiary education, staff are mostly lecturers who directly deliver knowledge to learners. Lecturers are considered the most decisive factor in education quality. Lecturers' satisfaction (in both teaching and research) plays the most important role in promoting their teaching motivation and acts as the basis to assess a university's human resources, [26], [27].

Academic staff development aims to create a lecturer team that is sufficient in number, guarantees quality and synchronizes in structure for efficiency in implementing the universities' training plan, creating an exciting and healthy environment for the lecturers for their delight, satisfaction and commitment to the universities, and contributing to the universities' development, [25]. There must be material and spiritual preferential policies for lecturers with high professional skills and capacities, facilitating them to well complete their jobs and assigned duties. Academic staff development is an administrators' solution for creating a team that is sufficient in number, of high quality and synchronizes in structure; and it is the main mission to be prioritized in comprehensive development strategies of universities. The term "academic staff development" can be interpreted as a general concept covering planning, selection and use, training and fostering, welfare implementation, and test and assessment.

Moreover, academic staff development in universities consists of positive changes in quantity, quality and structure of the academic staff to fulfill the educational and training goals and satisfy the universities' and society's needs. In terms of quantity, tertiary education institutions must have the necessary quantity of lecturers to meet the need of renewing training programs in each period, perfect the organization and payroll of the institutions, ensure balanced staff structure and increase the quality and strengths for individuals and resources. In terms of quality, currently, academic staff development in universities is not only about ensuring quantity, but also guaranteeing quality to effectively satisfy teaching and learning objectives.

In terms of lecturer structure, universities' lecturer structure is developed on the basis of ages, genders, academic titles and degrees, training resources, current staff and so on in a proper way for balance.

In the current situation, there must be breakthroughs in academic staff development regarding quantity and quality, [28]. To be more specific, lecturers must be serious in all aspects, have a high level of expertise, actively do scientific research, have practical understanding, effectively protect the Party's ideologies and master active teaching methods. To achieve the goal of academic staff development in the new period, universities must simultaneously apply several measures, such as making academic staff development plan during 2020-2030, building a lecturer team using proper methods, promoting lecturer training and fostering, creating an open scientific environment for lecturers, conducting frequent lecturer rotation, placing greater

focus on class observation and periodical assessment of the academic staff, and developing proper mechanism and policies, [29].

University of Education has high authority in staffing autonomy and academic staff development. To be more specific, the university is autonomous in document development, submission for approval and report to VNU Hanoi, implementation of staff development strategies, mechanism and operation, and the Rector's authority, which are presented in detail in staffing autonomy, [7].

### 3 Research Model

In this research, on the basis of the theoretical research and previous studies by other scholars, the researchers recommended and applied the following research model (Figure 1):

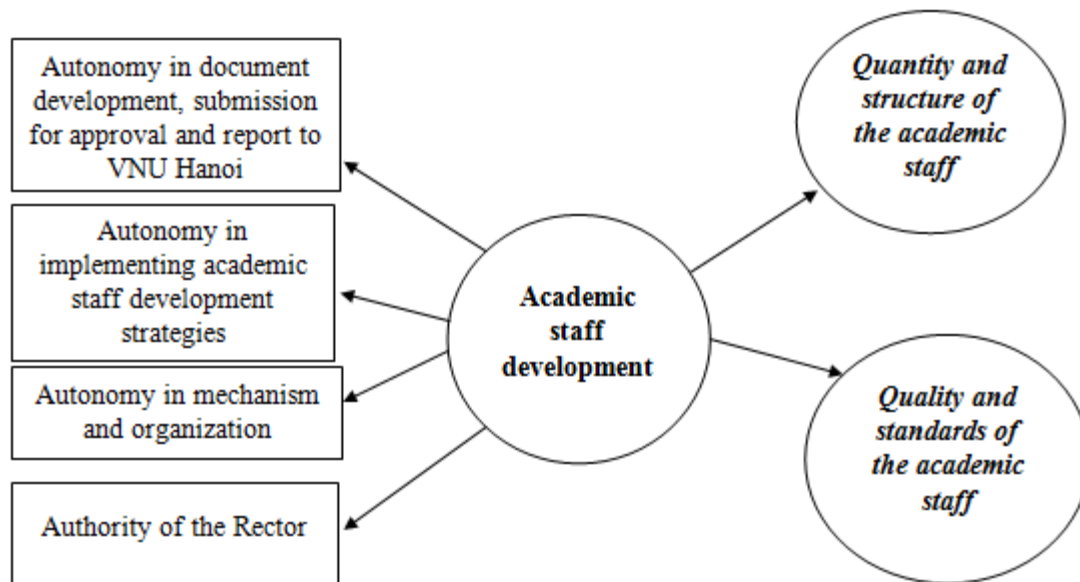


Fig. 1: Research model

### 4 Research Methodology

This particular project is a mix of quantitative and qualitative research. To be more specific, qualitative research was done through in-depth interviews with 25 managerial staff and lecturers from member units in VNU Hanoi for supplement and adjustment of the observed variables in each measurement scale. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the view to deeply investigating the real situation of and solutions for staffing autonomy for better adjustment of the scales. In-depth interviews were conducted with six managerial staff and 19 lecturers. All

interviews, each of which lasted 45 minutes, were done in three months.

The findings from the in-depth interviews with six managerial staff revealed more about the real situation of staffing autonomy in University of Education, and at the same time, were used as a basis for adjustments of the observed variables and solutions for staffing autonomy enhancement. The researcher also organized two discussion sessions for measurement scale adjustment and completion.

On the other hand, to collect the data for quantitative research, the researchers administered a

questionnaire. The original questionnaire was piloted with 30 academic staff to ensure its validity. The questionnaire surveyed four components of staffing autonomy that were investigated in this paper, including autonomy in document development, submission for approval and report to VNU Hanoi, autonomy in implementing academic staff development strategies, autonomy in mechanism and organization and authority of the rector. The questionnaire also explored the academic staff development from two aspects: quantity and structure of the academic staff, and quality and standards of the academic staff.

The questionnaire included two parts. The first part asked for the participant's information involving gender, academic title, academic degree and working experience. The second part included closed-ended questions related to the academic staff perception on staffing autonomy. Likert scales of five levels, from

(1) Totally disagree to (5) Totally agree were used to evaluate the academic staff perception and opinions.

The researcher administered the questionnaires in Google form to 135 lecturers working in different departments, faculties and centres in University of Education. He received 119 responses with 106 valid ones (accounting for 78.51%). The collected data was then analyzed using quantitative methods with data processing tools – SPSS 25.0 software and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). After that, the scales were tested with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The scales and models were tested according to various coefficients (Chi-square, degree of freedom, p value, and CFI, GFI, TLI and RMSEA indices), aggregate reliability, total variance explained, unidimensionality, convergence and discriminance, [30], [31].

The data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed and presented in the table below:

Table 1. Surveyed results

		N	%
Gender	Male	50	47.16
	Female	56	52.84
	<i>Total</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>100</i>
Academic title	Professor	2	1.89
	Associate Professor	18	16.98
	None	86	81.13
	<i>Total</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>100</i>
Academic degree	Doctor	92	86.79
	Master	14	13.21
	<i>Total</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>100</i>
Working experience	Under 10 years	02	1.89
	11-20 years	38	35.84
	21-30 years	42	39.63
	Over 30 years	24	22.64
	<i>Total</i>	<i>106</i>	<i>100</i>

As illustrated in the table, there was a difference in the number of the respondents by gender. To be more specific, the number of female lecturers, 56/106 (accounting for 52.84%), was higher than that of their male counterparts, 50/106 (making up for 47.16%). The majority of the lecturers in the research, 92/106 respondents (accounting for 86.79%), have already had doctoral degrees but have

not been titled professor/ associate professor. This was much higher compared to only 20 professors and associate professors out of 106 participants, making up for 18.87%. Nearly 40% of the respondents were lecturers with 21-30 years of teaching experience. Other groups with less than 10 years, 11-20 years and over 30 years of experience respectively accounted for 1.89%, 35.84% and 22.64%.

## 5 Findings and Discussions

### 5.1 Results of Academic Staff Development in University of Education

In the 2017-2021 period, the staff in University of Education was of proper structure and met the standards and requirements to implement the university's strategic missions. The staff was made up from different sources such as those managed by the University of Education, lecturers from member universities of VNU Hanoi in basic training, retired lecturers working under contract and guest lecturers.

As reported, staff planning enabled the staff to fulfill the needs in conducting training activities, scientific research and public services. During 2017-2021, the university carried out manpower need analysis with the view to fulfilling the university's objectives and strategies to become a research university in educational science by 2025 with a vision to 2035, aiming at administrative streamlining of no more than 30% and high-quality academic staff. As a result, the university had an overall review of the staff to set up and adjust the working position scheme, which was then approved by VNU Hanoi with the manpower allocation of 121 in 2015 and 376 in 2019. The manpower allocation in the scheme was updated for programs which started enrolling students in 2018 and added year by year based on the progress of the training programs and the objective to meet the scientific research needs in some new areas of education quality and education technology administration, etc.

University of Education also developed and updated its working position scheme in accordance with the State's regulations and guidelines. The scheme offered detailed description for each working position including administrative staff, lecturers and managing staff of the university's departments, faculties or centers. On the basis of the approved working position scheme, the university conducted staff planning and development in the 2017-2020 period which

focused on the development of the staff with integration capabilities and good IT skills, and more policies to attract high-quality lecturers (who have professor title and high international publication possibilities). These goals were achieved through targets set in the annual mission plan which did not only focus on the needed quantity of lecturers, but also on lecturers' professional development activities; and the results were reported afterwards. Therefore, during 2017-2021, the academic staff's structure and expertise always remained balanced and satisfied the needs to carry out the university's missions: lecturers with doctorate degree accounted for more than 70% and those titled associate professor/professor made up of 25%, which was considered of a high rate in tertiary education institutions and higher compared to other VNU Hanoi's member institutions.

The university also developed the annual recruitment plan with clear requirements of quantity and standards which was approved by VNU Hanoi prior to implementation. The recruitment information was published in the newspaper and the university's website. It also released recruitment guidelines and recruited new staff as regulated. The university received public officials without examination and recruited and used staff under fixed-term or casual employment contracts based on the working positions, candidates' qualification and the State's regulations. Exceptional admission of highly professional workers (holding doctorate degree and associate professor/ professor title) was done in a strict and effective way under VNU Hanoi's regulations. As a result, the university's recruitment results and contracting ensured the set targets with a remarkable increase in the academic staff year by year.

### 5.2 Reliability Test of Measurement Scales and Correlation Coefficient:

The Cronbach's Alpha reliability test results of the measurement scales were presented in the table 2:

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha test results of the scales

No.	Symbols	Corrected correlation	item-total	Cronbach's Alpha results if item deleted
<b><i>Cronbach's Alpha = .933 of the variables from P1a to P1i – Autonomy in document development, submission for approval and report VNU</i></b>				
1	P1a	.745		.926
2	P1b	.753		.925
3	P1c	.804		.922
4	P1d	.808		.922
5	P1e	.753		.925
6	P1f	.794		.923
7	P1g	.686		.930
8	P1h	.705		.929
9	P1i	.737		.926
<b><i>Cronbach's Alpha = .936 of variables from P2a to P2h – Autonomy in implementing academic staff development strategies</i></b>				
1	P2a	.713		.932
2	P2b	.785		.927
3	P2c	.772		.928
4	P2d	.802		.925
5	P2e	.815		.924
6	P2f	.785		.927
7	P2g	.792		.926
8	P2h	.740		.930
<b><i>Cronbach's Alpha = .943 of variables from P3a to P3h – Autonomy in staff mechanism</i></b>				
1	P3a	.826		.933
2	P3b	.698		.943
3	P3c	.781		.937
4	P3d	.774		.937
5	P3e	.831		.933
6	P3f	.844		.932
7	P3g	.817		.934
8	P3h	.819		.934

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***Cronbach's Alpha = .941 of variables from P4a to P4i – Rector's authority***

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1	P4a	.753	.936
2	P4b	.748	.936
3	P4c	.815	.932
4	P4d	.808	.933
5	P4e	.854	.930
6	P4f	.715	.938
7	P4g	.825	.932
8	P4h	.701	.939
9	P4i	.754	.936

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***Cronbach's Alpha = .962 of variables from P5a to P5e – Quantity and structure of academic staff***

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1	P5a	.879	.955
2	P5b	.895	.952
3	P5c	.911	.950
4	P5d	.900	.952
5	P5e	.877	.955

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***Cronbach's Alpha = .920 of variables from P6a to P6d – Quality and standards of academic staff***

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1	P6a	.782	.908
2	P6b	.833	.890
3	P6c	.824	.893
4	P6d	.825	.893

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As shown in the table, the Cronbach's Alpha test results of all measurement scales in the research were in the excellent range which was between 0.919 and 0.962. This could be interpreted that the scales were of satisfactory level. Additionally, the corrected item-total correlation values of the measured variables in the scales all exceeded 0.3 (to be more specific, 0.686-0.911), which meant that the scales had high reliability. Lastly, the Cronbach's Alpha results if item deleted were lower than the corrected item-total

correlation values, showing that all measured variables were valid. In general, the measurement scales in the research consisting of the designed and adopted items met the strict testing requirements and could be used in more complex analysis.

### **5.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)**

EFA test results of the measurement scales were illustrated in the following table:



Table 3. EFA test results of the scale

Observed variables	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
P2g	.754				
P2e	.751				
P2c	.706				
P2d	.636				
P3b	.628				
P3a	.569				
P2b	.557				
P3c	.518				
P2a					
P1d		.782			
P1c		.736			
P1e		.720			
P1b		.695			
P1i		.667			
P1f		.661			
P1a		.622			
P1g		.599			
P1h		.580			
P5b			.819		
P5e			.796		
P5a			.790		
P5c			.785		
P5d			.777		
P4h				.686	
P4i				.669	
P3e				.647	
P3f				.614	
P3d				.594	
P4e				.554	
P2h				.539	
P3g				.520	
P3h				.501	
P4f					.665
P4c					.597
P4d					.588
P4g					.584
P4b					.584
<b>Eigenvalues</b>	22.705	22.705	22.705	22.705	22.705
<b>Total variance explained</b>	17.525	34.283	49.403	64.416	74.897
<b>KMO parameter</b>				.964	
<b>Barlett test</b>		<b>Chi-Square</b>		8164.519	
		<b>Df</b>		741	
		<b>Sig.</b>		.000	

The above table illustrated the EFA testing results of the four factors in staffing autonomy.

Initially, as presented in the table, the KMO coefficient was 0.964 (which was within the range

from 0.5 to 1.0); the Barlett's test value was below 0.05; the Factor Loading coefficient was above 0.5; and the Eigenvalues of all four factors were more than 1.0. These figures showed the convergence of the factors, which indicated that the findings from factor analysis with the data set in the research was acceptable. Secondly, as the total variance explained was 74.897%, well above 50%, the factor analysis model was proved to be suitable. This also showed that the five above factors were capable of explaining the variation of the data of 74.897%. In general, the rotation matrix results of the scales in Table 2 presented 45 observed variables classified into different independent factor groups: Autonomy in document development, submission for approval and report to VNU Hanoi about its academic staff development strategies, Autonomy in implementing academic staff development strategies, Autonomy in mechanism and organization, and Authority of the Rector with specific and detailed description in staffing autonomy. In this research, no item was eliminated as none of them existed in two factor groups or shifted to another factor group, and all of the figures were greater than 0.7. Other observed variables were all suitable to use in EFA.

## 6 Conclusion and Administrative Implications

### 6.1 Conclusion

Thanks to the staffing autonomy policy, University of Education was able to develop its academic staff into one that was sufficient in quantity, and reached and even surpassed the required student-lecturer ratio. The structure of the academic staff was balanced; the staff were assigned jobs in line with their expertise; and the lecturers' standards and quality were beyond the requirements of the Ministry of Education and Training and VNU Hanoi, which greatly contributed to the fulfillment of their responsibilities in teaching, scientific research and public services.

The staffing autonomy in University of Education was represented by the following basic factors: (1) Autonomy in document development, submission for approval and report to VNU Hanoi about its academic staff development strategies, (2) Autonomy in implementing academic staff development strategies, (3) Autonomy in

mechanism and organization, and (4) Authority of the Rector, and illustrated through certain indices. The quantitative and qualitative research findings showed that the identification of these factors and indices was totally suitable to achieve the research purposes (which was shown in the results of the rotation matrix).

The measurement scales on the impacts of the staffing autonomy factors on academic staff development were standardized and met the strict testing requirements. Therefore, these scales can be applied in future research projects with a similar model. From a practical perspective, this study has identified the positive impacts and direct correlation of staffing autonomy to the academic staff development in University of Education.

### 6.2 Administrative Implications

University autonomy in general, and staffing autonomy in particular, is granted for University of Education by VNU Hanoi in a specific route and in line with the university's capabilities of enforcing autonomy and accountability. Hence, to facilitate this progress under objective laws and practical conditions, the University of Education needs to make continuous efforts to prepare necessary conditions, enhance its autonomy capabilities and proactively perform its accountability. On the other hand, it is also important that the university cover all key aspects in staffing autonomy (including Autonomy in academic staff development strategy development, submission for approval and report to VNU Hanoi, Autonomy in implementing academic staff development strategies, Autonomy in mechanism and organization, and Authority of the Rector) for further development of the academic staff, guaranteeing sufficient quantity, high quality and synchronized and balanced structure.

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