





University autonomy in human resource management: An analysis of the state of public universities in the Mekong Delta Region, Vietnam

 Dang Thi Thu
Lieu¹

 Le Khanh Tuan²⁺

 Truong Tan Dat³

^{1,2}Dong Thap University, Vietnam.

¹Email: dtllieu@dthu.edu.vn

³Email: truongtandat@dthu.edu.vn

²Sai Gon University, Vietnam.

³Email: ltkuan@sgu.edu.vn



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

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This study delves into the intricacies of human resource management practices within public universities in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam specifically focusing on autonomous institutions. We conducted a comprehensive survey across five public universities, engaging 245 managers, 414 lecturers and 156 experts leveraging the statistical analysis tool SPSS. In-depth interviews provided nuanced insights increasing our quantitative approach. Our multifaceted analysis of human resource management processes encompassed several critical dimensions: workforce planning, adjustments to professional titles, workforce quality assessment, training quality and the work environment. The findings underscore that workforce planning prioritized administrative positions yet faced formidable challenges and exhibited suboptimal success rates. Notably, the timely monitoring and adjustment of professional titles for public employees during job transitions were conspicuously absent. Furthermore, the actual workforce quality remained unassessed significantly impacting job assignments, training effectiveness and career progression. Subpar training and staff development quality influenced by prevailing social hierarchies hindered the efficient allocation of roles. Moreover, the work environment suffered from a deficit of openness and knowledge sharing adversely affecting faculty development. Our results illuminate the pressing need to fortify workforce planning strategies, enhance employee evaluation methods and elevate training approaches. Additionally, fostering friendly, open work environments aligned with the unique context of Vietnamese public universities emerges as a pivotal avenue for improvement.

Contribution/Originality: This is the first detailed study to comprehensively survey and evaluates the implementation of steps in the human resource management process at autonomous public universities in the Mekong Delta. The achievements, challenges and difficulties identified provide insights for macro-level policy recommendations in human resource management at public universities in Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human resource management has been extensively studied by experts and researchers from various perspectives. Thorough analysis and research are essential when applying general human resource management theories to specific organizations like universities. Universities, as tightly structured institutions operate under the influence of multiple factors. Their workforce primarily consists of highly educated individuals and their scientific working environment significantly differs from typical organizations such as businesses. Universities must choose

truly appropriate approaches for important areas such as workforce planning, organizational design, recruitment and selection, training and development, creating a favorable working environment, promoting employee creativity and conducting effective performance appraisals. Therefore, human resource management in universities holds special importance.

The fundamental importance of human resource management lies in effectively managing teams and individuals within an organization to achieve competitive advantage and success (Potgieter & Mokomane, 2020). In another aspect, the diverse leadership styles of organizations also affect employee performance especially in unusual situations such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. When examining the impact of organizational support, fair reward systems, training, development and information sharing on employee engagement in the Saudi Arabian telecommunications sector, researchers have indicated that employee engagement yields numerous benefits and organizations have emphasized different techniques to enhance employee engagement to gain a competitive edge in the market. Engelsberger, Halvorsen, Cavanagh, and Bartram (2022) argue that analyzing specific departmental operations and alignment with actual work will significantly support human resource development.

In the context of Industry 4.0, the rapid transformations occurring in most organizations underscore the critical role of human resource management in strategic management (Zhou, Liu, Chang, & Wang, 2021). Human resource management in practice provides essential tools for organizational change, innovation and informed decision-making (Sheehan, De Cieri, Cooper, & Shea, 2016). Currently, many Vietnamese universities face challenges in implementing digital transformation initiatives. The main obstacle lies in training and developing faculty and staff to effectively deploy digital initiatives. At the same time, it helps lecturers to be strong enough to train learners to become citizens who meet the standards in the global citizen digital competency framework (Le, 2023).

Universities in Vietnam are prioritizing research on human resource management due to its importance. Public universities operate within an autonomous organizational and personnel framework, facing challenges in both theoretical and practical methods. For university administrators in Vietnam, human resource management remains a relatively new field. This paper investigates the current state of human resource management in public universities within the Mekong Delta region. This study aims to provide practical insights for universities in this region as well as across Vietnam to develop human resource management solutions that enhance the quality of human resources and align with educational standards in the context of university autonomy.

Tran (2018) synthesised the approach using worldwide research results. Vietnam has adopted the general human resource management process to various levels in educational institutions (Cobanoglu, Sertel, & Sarkaya, 2018; Hilb, 2000; Nadler, 1980). Additionally, a six-step human resource management process specific to autonomous universities has been implemented (Le, Dang, & Truong, 2024). However, detailed evaluations of the outcomes of this process in public universities remain scarce. The Mekong Delta region presents an educational challenge nationwide characterized by unique practical contexts. *Our research aims to answer the question "How do public universities in this region practically implement human resource management processes?"*

We contribute scientifically and practically by identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges and underlying factors. These insights will inform human resource management administrators in devising effective strategies to enhance human resource management efficiency. Furthermore, our findings may also guide the macro-level for the country considering this region (with a substantial population of 18% of the country's total).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Human Resources of the University

The term 'human resources' emerged in the 1980s when there were fundamental changes in the methods of managing and using human labor in the economy. Human resources refer to "the human capital" of an

organization—the individuals with the ability and potential to contribute to the organization's development, alongside the socio-economic development of the country, region or world (Henry, 2017). This understanding of human resources stems from the notion that they are the 'human capital' creating the capacity and strength of an organization. Human resources have the following three fundamental characteristics: Quantity, quality, and structure. Different organizations have varying requirements for the quantity, quality and structure of their human resources.

The human resources of a university encompass all individuals with physical strength, mental abilities, and professional skills who work in various positions to fulfill the university's functions and tasks applying this approach to universities. This includes administrators, lecturers and support staff involved in education and training. The quantity, quality and structure of human resources depend on the university's functions, tasks, organizational structure and developmental needs which may evolve over different stages.

2.2. Autonomous Environment in Human Resource Management of Universities in Vietnam

The term “autonomous environment” refers specifically to the legal framework governing autonomy rights. In Vietnam, the autonomy rights concerning organizational structure and personnel within universities are defined by a system of legal documents issued by the state (Government, 2019; National Assembly, 2018). Accordingly, public universities are granted autonomy in two key areas: 1) *Organizational Structure*: Public universities have the right to autonomously establish, reorganize and dissolve units to ensure effective educational activities. This includes decisions related to the university's administrative machinery. 2) *Personnel Autonomy*: Universities have the authority to determine the number of employees, their positions, recruitment processes, utilization and termination. Personnel autonomy is closely linked to financial autonomy allowing universities to meet human resource management requirements effectively.

2.3. Human Resource Management at Universities

According to Nadler (1980) and Tran (2018) human resource management in universities comprises three main groups of tasks: 1) *Human Resource Development*: This involves individualized development for each member of the workforce. It includes training, skill-building and professional development to enhance their expertise and competencies. 2) *Personnel Utilization*: Efficiently managing human resources involves recruitment, job placement, and optimal utilization of personnel. This ensures that the right people are in the right roles. 3) *Creating a Human Resource Environment*: Establishing a conducive environment within the university involves building a strong organizational culture, motivating employees, fostering a research-oriented atmosphere and promoting continuous learning. In addition to managerial functions, emphasizing strategic direction and workforce planning is crucial in human resource management.

2.4. Issues Facing Public Universities in the Mekong Delta

Various studies on human resource management in universities reveal that the impact of managerial entities can yield specific effects from different perspectives. If administrators establish a scientifically sound human resource management process, the cumulative impact of management will be effective. Therefore, creating a human resource management framework is a practical necessity for university human resource managers.

In the development of human resources in universities, the first crucial aspect is that leaders, faculty, and staff must have a proper understanding of the essential role of human resource management in building a high-performing university. The academic culture is vital for innovation and the development of higher education institutions including knowledge sharing among scholars (Asbari, Purba, Hariandja, & Sudibjo, 2023). An academic environment focused on ongoing learning and progress is facilitated by the ongoing cultivation of collaborative

values in addition to vision-sharing, faculty member autonomy and value. According to [Areesophonpichet, Bhula-Or, Malaiwong, Phadung, and Thanitbenjasith \(2024\)](#) in Thai universities, establishing policies and mechanisms for human resource development is a fundamental factor in attracting and nurturing talent. Beyond mechanisms, university leadership policies have the responsibility to provide an equitable environment for faculty members aiming for excellence which requires a high level of academic achievement and legal knowledge of the country ([Sanchez-Danday, 2019](#)). From another perspective, the administrative competence of principals also positively influences the work performance of lecturers. Principals who closely supervise exhibit effective leadership styles and communicate efficiently significantly enhancing the job effectiveness of teachers.

[Cooke, Schuler, and Varma \(2020\)](#) noted that the rise of economic-social development in Asia has made this region extremely important. Consequently, human resource management issues have significantly evolved. The development of social human resources is closely linked to the development of human resources at universities. Universities are at the forefront of research. Their human resources play a vital role in providing high-quality education to society. Research on human resource management at Vietnamese universities by [Pham \(2024\)](#) has shown that autonomous universities positively impact the work efficiency of faculty members at higher education institutions. Autonomy in human resource management significantly influences employee motivation creates a conducive work environment and encourages faculty members to develop their creative abilities. These findings align with the research of [Suriansyah, Aslamiah, Noorhapizah, Winardi, and Dalle \(2019\)](#) and [Tentama and Abdussalam \(2020\)](#). Another study by [Avidov-Ungar, Friedman, and Olshtain \(2014\)](#) revealed that in autonomous university environments, faculty members are given more autonomy leading to greater opportunities to take on responsibilities related to educational goals. This improves their work outcomes while also empowering them as educators and giving them more influence over students. [Suriansyah et al.'s \(2019\)](#) research also found a significant and positive relationship between the autonomous rights of universities in Indonesia and the work outcomes of faculty members. This indicates that granting autonomous rights to universities in human resource management has led to positive outcomes.

Effective human resource management processes have been established for organizations considering the importance of human resource development over many decades. [Nadler \(1980\)](#) proposed that human resource management consists of the following three components: Developing human resources using human resources and creating a human resource environment. These concepts have been further developed and widely used in many countries ([Nadler & Wiggs, 1986](#)). [Hilb \(2000\)](#) introduced a model of human resource management as one of the three components of organizational development alongside leadership and influencing factors. In Turkey, human resource management includes components such as recruitment, training, development, employee engagement and employee evaluation ([Cobanoglu et al., 2018](#)). Indonesia established a strong emphasis on human resource planning as it is a regulatory tool for enhancing human resources and improving worker productivity.

In Vietnam, there is immense pressure on faculty and university management staff to meet the demand for human resource training in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution ([Le, 2023](#)). The need to innovate human resource management methods is considered essential for all universities leading to numerous applied research studies. [Tran \(2018\)](#) developed a human resource management model based on functional components proposing a comprehensive process applicable to organizations. This process includes planning, recruitment, arrangement, training, fostering creating an enabling environment, and motivating employees. [Le et al. \(2024\)](#) have formulated a human resource management process specifically tailored for public universities in Vietnam based on existing research findings and leveraging university autonomy regulations as a foundation. This process comprises the following six key steps:

i. Human Resource Planning: This step involves establishing a solid legal basis understanding theories related to university autonomy, analyzing and evaluating the current state of human resource management and creating annual human resource development plans.

ii. Human Resource Recruitment: Universities implement recruitment and selection processes make recruitment decisions and evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment activities after each recruitment cycle.

iii. Arrangement, Utilization and Evaluation of Human Resources: This step includes task assignment, performance monitoring for civil servants and ensuring optimal conditions for their work.

iv. Training and Development of Human Resources: Universities analyze needs and objectives for each job position based on human resource evaluations. Then they plan and implement training and development programs evaluating their effectiveness.

v. Establishing Policies and an Environment for Human Resource Development: Universities design wage policies, attract and retain human resources (with a focus on retaining talented people) and enhance the capacity of talented individuals who significantly contribute to the university's development.

vi. Inspection, Supervision, and Evaluation of Human Resource Development Implementation: This step involves setting standards and criteria for inspection and evaluation, decentralizing inspection activities, establishing information channels for reporting and conducting preliminary and final reviews. The goal is to continuously improve the management cycle based on experiences and lessons learnt.

Public universities in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam currently face new opportunities and challenges. The Law amending and supplementing (National Assembly, 2018), the Law on Higher Education (National Assembly, 2012) and Decree No. 99/2019 (Government, 2019) emphasize the establishment of university councils and grant autonomy to universities introducing new management requirements. University autonomy encompasses academic and professional autonomy, organizational and personnel autonomy and financial and property autonomy. Organizational and personnel autonomy includes decisions related to the establishment, reorganization and dissolution of affiliated and subordinate units as well as determining the number of staff and job positions. Universities also have the authority to recruit, use and dismiss civil servants and other workers appointing management personnel based on competence. The autonomy mechanism directly impacts university organization and personnel particularly in the realm of human resource management. Higher levels of autonomy enable more flexible and proactive human resource management activities allowing universities to establish effective management mechanisms and regulations. However, the Mekong Delta region has long been considered an educationally disadvantaged area. Most education indicators in the region fall below the national average and those of other regions. Consequently, local education and training sectors in this region face more intense challenges compared to other localities (Dang & Truong, 2024; General Statistics Office, 2022; Nguyen & Vu, 2020; Phan & Tran, 2012).

Human resource management activities are still relatively new for universities in Vietnam. Public universities in the Mekong Delta region face several challenges compared to the national average, including difficulties in human resource management. The critical question arises: Is the development of human resources a pivotal factor in training quality sufficiently addressed by universities in this region? Our research analysis and evaluates the current state of human resource management through a six-step process. Universities can derive valuable lessons to formulate a human resource development strategy for the period up to 2030 by identifying strengths and weaknesses. These insights also serve as reference points for national policy drawn from practical experiences in an economically promising region with distinct characteristics.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Research Purpose: This study aims to accurately evaluate the implementation of human resource management processes at public autonomous universities in the Mekong Delta. The advantages and disadvantages derived from executing the 6 steps in the human resource management process will be reported as reference material for universities to enhance their personnel management practices. Additionally, macro-level management policies for the region and the country will be suggested.

Survey Method: The current situation is surveyed using a combination of questionnaires and in-depth interviews. There are 6 questionnaires with specific questions related to the steps in the human resource management process (see Appendix 1). The interview questions provide additional context to clarify the quantitative results obtained from the questionnaires.

Data Collection Method: The survey is conducted through Google Forms or paper questionnaires. In-depth interview questions are directly sent to experts. Participants are informed about the survey's purpose and instructed to provide honest and objective evaluations before answering the questionnaires and interview questions. Data collection took place from August 2023 to February 2024. Collected data is carefully reviewed to eliminate errors or to request additional responses from participants before processing the results.

3.2. Research Population

The Mekong Delta region has 11 public universities. The sample size for the survey is 815 individuals representing 35% of the total population (including 245 managers, 414 lecturers and 156 staff members) from 5 universities (accounting for 45.5% of the total number of universities): An Giang University, Bac Lieu University, Can Tho University, Dong Thap University and Kien Giang University. The sample selection and size align with Yamane (1973). In-depth interviews were conducted with 18 randomly selected managers, lecturers and experts from various universities.

Table 1 presents the number of individuals selected for the survey based on the current situation.

Table 1. Presents the number of individuals selected for the survey in the current situation.

Universities	Number of processed survey forms		
	Managers	Lecturers	Experts
An Giang University	38	67	27
Bac Lieu University	19	29	10
Can Tho University	124	200	53
Dong Thap University	40	52	37
Kien Giang University	24	66	29
Total	245	414	156

3.3. Tools for Testing and Processing Results

Data Processing Method: Data is processed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software (IBM, 2024) to compute survey results. A 5-point Likert scale is employed. Scores are converted to a 5-point scale corresponding to evaluation levels from 1 to 5. The overall evaluation is based on mean values categorized as follows: Low (1.00 - 1.80), moderate (1.81 - 2.60), fair (2.61 - 3.40), good (3.41 - 4.20), and excellent (4.21 - 5.00).

Reliability Analysis of the Scale: The reliability of the scale is assessed using Cronbach's alpha and the total correlation coefficient of each observed variable within the scale. A scale is considered reliable when Cronbach's alpha exceeds 0.6 and individual items within each scale are accepted when their correlation values reach 0.3 or higher.

Table 2. Presents summary data analyzing the reliability of the results.

Steps of the human resource management process	Reliability statistics		Corrected item-total correlation							
	Cronbach's alpha	No. of items	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8
Status of human resource planning.	0.965	8	0.850	0.861	0.849	0.874	0.871	0.871	0.870	0.867
Status of human resource recruitment.	0.941	5	0.805	0.834	0.873	0.861	0.831	-	-	-
Status of using and evaluating human resources.	0.955	7	0.837	0.827	0.840	0.844	0.866	0.844	0.855	-
Status of training and fostering human resources.	0.905	5	0.818	0.849	0.849	0.799	0.499	-	-	-
Status of environment creation and human resource development policies.	0.929	4	0.828	0.843	0.845	0.821	-	-	-	-
Status of inspection, supervision and evaluation of human resource results.	0.959	5	0.883	0.888	0.892	0.888	0.874	-	-	-

Survey Result Analysis Method: In this study, we adopted the explanatory sequential design model (Creswell, 2012) for our research. After processing, the data obtained from the survey will be used for quantitative assessments. Additionally, qualitative evaluations are included to further clarify observations and assessments related to human resource management practices in universities.

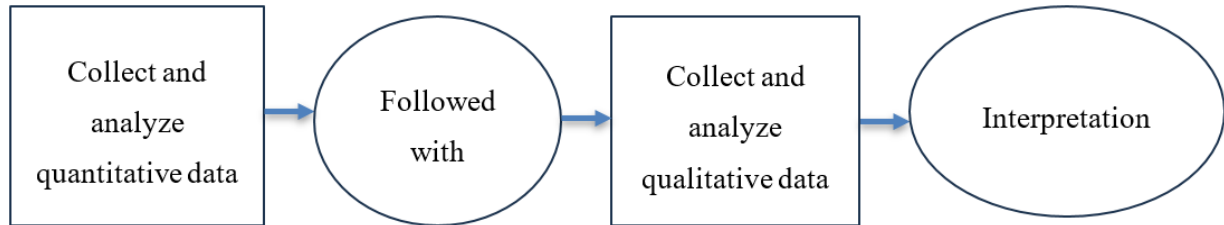


Figure 1. Explanatory sequential design model.

Source: Creswell (2012).

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The results of the analysis and evaluation of the current situation were conducted according to the detailed content in the steps of the human resource management process. These have been concretized for application in the context of Vietnam and are suitable for the practical characteristics of the Mekong Delta region.

4.1. Current Status of Human Resource Planning in an Autonomous University Environment

This content was surveyed with 8 specific items as follows (see Table 3):

- *Item 1.* Develop a human resource development plan for the university for a period of 5 to 10 years.
- *Item 2.* The content of the human resource development plan is consistent with the university’s development strategy, planning, and legal regulations.
- *Item 3.* Analyze and evaluate the human resources of the previous stage fully and accurately.
- *Item 4.* Develop a vision, objectives and indicators for appropriate human resource development.
- *Item 5.* Solutions for human resource development are feasible and suitable for practice.

- *Item 6.* Assign and delegate the implementation of measures and solutions for appropriate human resource development.
- *Item 7.* Develop a job position project that is consistent with human resource planning.
- *Item 8.* Develop an annual human resource development plan to meet training requirements.

Table 3. Evaluation of human resource planning results.

Items	Managers		Lecturers		Experts		Overall	
	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations
1	4.13	0.780	4.17	0.790	4.25	0.792	4.17	0.787
2	4.09	0.787	4.16	0.791	4.19	0.763	4.14	0.784
3	4.03	0.776	4.11	0.777	4.19	0.754	4.10	0.773
4	4.09	0.803	4.13	0.811	4.13	0.779	4.12	0.802
5	4.11	0.772	4.14	0.827	4.19	0.785	4.14	0.802
6	4.04	0.759	4.14	0.809	4.17	0.769	4.11	0.788
7	4.09	0.786	4.16	0.841	4.20	0.838	4.15	0.824
8	4.14	0.798	4.18	0.820	4.24	0.806	4.18	0.810

The results of the evaluative survey as presented in Table 3 with the frequency of evaluations (based on the percentage of respondents) at different descriptive levels in Figure 1 indicate that universities have achieved a commendable level of human resource planning within the context of university autonomy (overall average score: 4.14; standard deviation: 0.796). The perceptions of surveyed participants are notably consistent with minimal variation across the constituent items related to human resource planning. Average scores range from 4.10 to 4.18 with standard deviations spanning 0.773 to 0.824. Notably, the highest-rated item is “Developing an annual human resource development plan” (average score: 4.18) while the lowest average score (4.10) corresponds to “Human resource development planning based on the analysis and evaluation of human resources from the previous planning period.” However, it’s worth noting that a small proportion of items were evaluated at the weak level.

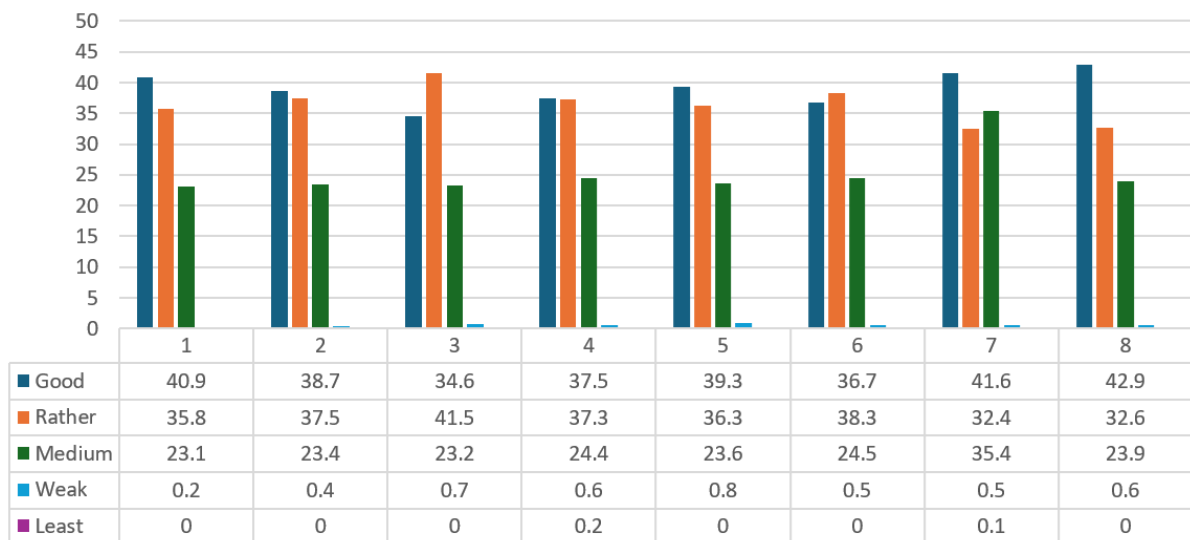


Figure 2. Illustrates the frequency of comments on the level of human resource planning.

The results of in-depth interviews with participants reveal varying perceptions regarding the implementation level of human resource planning in the autonomous context of public universities. Some people assess the implementation as falling short of requirements due to multiple factors within the same university. These factors include the constant fluctuations in human resources caused by external influences as well as rapid changes in

societal needs. Conversely, other opinions suggest that human resource planning within the university is methodical and aligns with the institution's development strategy.

Organizational and human resource planning is tailored to the actual needs and long-term development goals of the university promoting sustainable growth. The quality of planning receives high praise, incorporating innovative and flexible elements to adapt to shifts in the educational landscape. Attention should be directed toward planning for highly qualified faculty members with teaching experience and research expertise while the overall planning quality is relatively good. Additionally, planning for emerging industries and occupations is essential with enhancing forecasting capabilities and adaptability to external changes.

Universities have developed plans, strategies and timely actions in accordance with human resource planning trends. However, continuous efforts are needed to improve operations taking into account the diversity and unevenness of staffing as well as cultural and social factors. In fact, many universities cannot predict the future development of the professions leading to passivity in human resource planning. Therefore, there are cases where planning lacks necessary forecasting bases making it formal.

4.2. Current Status of Human Resource Recruitment

Recruitment is the process of supplementing human resources for the operational areas of universities ensuring an adequate number of workers and meeting the requirements and standards for each job position. The survey on the current state of human resource recruitment was conducted on the following 5 items (see Table 4):

- *Item 1.* The recruitment of staff is based on job requirements, job positions, occupational title standards, and the university's salary fund.
- *Item 2.* The level of implementation of promotional and recruitment activities.
- *Item 3.* The level of implementation of selection and recruitment of human resources.
- *Item 4.* The current status of making decisions on recruiting human resources.
- *Item 5.* Organizing the evaluation of effectiveness after recruitment activities.

Table 4. Level of implementation of human resource recruitment activities.

Items	Managers		Lecturers		Experts		Overall	
	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations
1	4.18	0.818	4.18	0.825	4.25	0.824	4.19	0.823
2	4.01	0.765	4.08	0.822	4.19	0.752	4.08	0.794
3	4.04	0.770	4.10	0.827	4.20	0.782	4.10	0.802
4	4.07	0.759	4.09	0.820	4.23	0.777	4.11	0.795
5	3.93	0.839	4.06	0.834	4.16	0.823	4.04	0.837

The survey data in Table 4 indicates that universities in the Mekong Delta region have performed reasonably well in recruiting human resources within an autonomous environment. The results are reflected in average values ranging from 4.04 to 4.19 with standard deviations between 0.794 and 0.837 (the overall average value is 4.10 with a standard deviation of 0.810). All items receive fair ratings with the highest-rated item being "Recruitment of staff based on job requirements, job positions, occupational title standards, and the university's salary fund" (average value: 4.19). Conversely, the lowest-rated item is "organizing the evaluation of effectiveness after recruitment activities" (average value: 4.04).

However, the survey results also highlight several indicators evaluated at a weak or poor level regarding the implementation of human resource recruitment work. Notably, the highest concern lies in the "organizing the evaluation of effectiveness after recruitment activities." This issue warrants universities' attention and improvement efforts for better practices in the future.

The findings from in-depth interviews align with the survey results. Although the recruitment process adheres to regulations, its complexity and time-consuming nature hinder meeting demand. Streamlining certain steps could save time and costs while recruitment practices are relatively transparent. Basic recruitment meets immediate needs but enhancing efficiency is crucial to address the university's future human resource requirements. Although the recruitment process has been improved, it is still affected by social relationships, sometimes leading to low selection quality and difficulty in recruiting talented people. This observation is consistent with annual assessments conducted by state human resource management agencies.

4.3. Current Status of Human Resource Utilization and Evaluation

The current status of human resource utilization and evaluation in universities is analyzed and examined according to the following 7 items (see Table 5):

- *Item 1.* The reasonableness of the arrangement and utilization of human resources.
- *Item 2.* The degree of compatibility of the workload with the working time of employees.
- *Item 3.* The suitability of the recruitment position and the tasks assigned to employees.
- *Item 4.* Is the staffing arrangement and organization consistent with the capabilities, strengths, and aspirations of each employee?
- *Item 5.* The organization of regular or sudden evaluation of human resources.
- *Item 6.* The criteria and standards for evaluating human resources are regularly reviewed and improved.
- *Item 7.* Results of human resource assessment are used effectively to promote the universities's development.

According to the survey data in Table 5 and Figure 2, it can be seen that the level of implementation of human resource utilization and evaluation activities in an autonomous environment at various universities is fairly good with average values ranging from 4.03 - 4.13 and standard deviations from 0.754 - 0.821. The overall average value is 4.07 and the standard deviation is 0.792. All items are rated fairly among which the item “the degree of arrangement and utilization of human resources” has the highest average value of 4.13. The item “the results of human resource evaluation are effectively used” has the lowest average value of 4.03. However, the survey results also show that many items about the frequency of evaluation of the level of implementation of human resource utilization and evaluation are weak and poor. The highest is the item “the criteria and standards for evaluating human resources are regularly reviewed and improved” and “the results of human resource evaluation are effectively used.”

Table 5. Level of implementation of human resource use and evaluation activities.

Items	Managers		Lecturers		Experts		Overall	
	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations
1	4.08	0.748	4.13	0.788	4.19	0.763	4.13	0.771
2	4.02	0.760	4.11	0.748	4.12	0.756	4.08	0.754
3	4.04	0.734	4.10	0.797	4.15	0.788	4.09	0.777
4	4.05	0.764	4.09	0.795	4.15	0.802	4.09	0.787
5	3.91	0.822	4.09	0.820	4.14	0.782	4.04	0.818
6	3.90	0.816	4.10	0.825	4.14	0.774	4.05	0.818
7	3.91	0.818	4.05	0.835	4.17	0.769	4.03	0.821

The in-depth interview results highlight that the utilization of human resources falls short of optimal effectiveness due to excessive reliance on management regulations. This passivity within universities results in a lack of necessary flexibility and agility. Human resource evaluation primarily adheres to state regulations, occasionally becoming overly bureaucratic and time-consuming without achieving a clear focus or emphasizing strengths for building a robust human resource plan.

Additional criteria are needed to assess the effectiveness of officers, lecturers, and employees while the evaluation criteria and standards are relatively comprehensive and accurate. The evaluation process could benefit from streamlining certain steps to save time and costs although stringent. While evaluation results reflect the capacities of personnel, their effective utilization remains crucial for innovative human resource management.

Improving the evaluation method is essential for achieving more substantial outcomes. The student evaluation of lecturers still faces limitations often being subjective, emotional, and biased. Addressing these challenges will positively impact teaching motivation among lecturers.

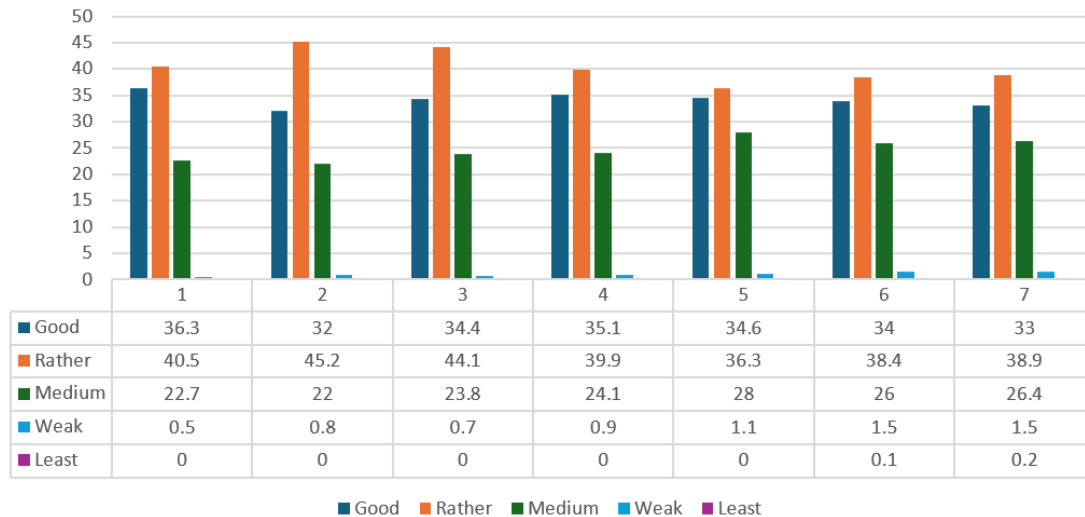


Figure 3. Illustrates the frequency of comments on the use and evaluation of human resources.

4.4. Current Status of Training and Fostering Human Resources

Training and fostering of human resources is a regular activity of public universities in the Mekong Delta region aimed at developing human resources to better meet work requirements and contribute to improving the quality of human resources. The evaluation results of training and fostering activities are shown in Table 6 according to the following 5 items:

- Item 1. Identifying training and fostering needs.
- Item 2. Defining training and fostering objectives.
- Item 3. Developing detailed training and fostering plans.
- Item 4. Implementing training and fostering.
- Item 5. Evaluating the effectiveness and results of training and fostering.

Table 6. Level of implementation of training and fostering activities.

Items	Managers		Lecturers		Experts		Overall	
	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations
1	4.35	0.858	4.37	0.844	4.36	0.850	4.36	0.848
2	4.38	0.848	4.32	0.852	4.35	0.856	4.34	0.851
3	4.33	0.860	4.31	0.865	4.38	0.868	4.33	0.863
4	4.31	0.851	4.29	0.871	4.29	0.873	4.30	0.865
5	4.26	0.803	4.38	0.758	4.50	0.758	4.37	0.775

According to survey results in Table 6, we see that the activities of training and fostering of human resources in an autonomous environment at universities are evaluated as good with an overall average value of 4.34 and a standard deviation of 0.840. The average values of the items range from 4.30 - 4.37 and the standard deviations from 0.775 - 0.865 all at a good level. This shows that universities have paid attention to well implementing the

activities of training and developing human resources for the university. However, in each surveyed item, there are evaluations at a weak level accounting for a proportion ranging from 0.2 - 1.3%. The item “evaluating the effectiveness of training and fostering” has the highest proportion of weak and poor evaluation (1.3% weak and 0.1% poor).

The results of in-depth interviews indicate that universities have effectively implemented on-site human resource training and development. All universities have annual training and retraining plans in place. The process of selecting personnel for training courses is conducted fairly based on job position needs. The content and programs for training and development are tailored to each target group. After undergoing training, staff members demonstrate clear improvements in skills and knowledge contributing to overall university development.

However, some expectations remain unmet despite universities having continuous solutions for human resource training and development. For instance, the selection and assignment of personnel for training could be better aligned with global trends and Vietnam’s educational landscape as well as the universities’ development strategies. Additionally, there are cases where progress is slow impacting the university’s human resource development plan. Furthermore, some staff members seek transfers to units with better conditions and higher income leading to a phenomenon known as “brain drain” after training and development .

These survey results align with the current requirements of higher education in Vietnam. Universities must strive to enhance the quality of their staff to meet the standards of higher education institutions (MOET, 2024) while also fulfilling requirements related to program distribution and admissions targets (MOET, 2022). However, in many universities, post-training and fostering effectiveness assessment is often overlooked. Several training programs still follow a traditional approach primarily focused on meeting certification requirements for learners. Addressing this reality requires universities to seriously reconsider and adjust their practices to meet the demands of educational innovation.

4.5. Current Status of Establishing Environment and Policies for Human Resource Development

Reasonable policies and a conducive working environment are important motivators to attract and retain human resources for work and contribute long-term to the university. The establishment of policies and a working environment to develop human resources at universities is surveyed according to the following 4 items (see Table 7):

- *Item 1.* Wage payment policy.
- *Item 2.* The attractiveness of the job.
- *Item 3.* A consensus working environment, self-learning, support and sharing.
- *Item 4.* Providing favorable conditions for staff to complete their tasks.

Table 7. Current status of creating environment and policies for human resource development.

Items	Managers		Lecturers		Experts		Overall	
	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations
1	4.12	0.790	4.09	0.806	3.93	0.809	4.05	0.807
2	4.01	0.770	4.09	0.777	3.95	0.774	4.03	0.777
3	4.16	0.775	4.11	0.787	4.02	0.773	4.09	0.782
4	4.19	0.771	4.13	0.819	4.04	0.775	4.11	0.798

According to survey results in Table 7 and Figure 3, it can be seen that the establishment of policies and a working environment for human resource development at universities is rated as fairly good with an overall average value of 4.07 and a standard deviation of 0.791. The average values of the items range from 4.03 to 4.11 and standard deviations from 0.777 to 0.807. Among them, the item “creating favorable conditions for staff to complete tasks” is rated as the best with an average value of 4.11. The item “the attractiveness of the job” is rated

as the lowest with an average value of 4.03. According to Figure 3 on the frequency of evaluation, it can be seen that all items have a weak evaluation rate ranging from 0.2 - 1.8%. Specifically, for the indicator “wage payment policy”, the weak evaluation rate is the highest at 1.8% and the 0.1% least evaluation.

The results of in-depth interviews reveal that universities have established and continuously improved policies and environments for human resource development. University leaders prioritize this aspect. These institutions have implemented policies and created work environments that support staff professional development, self-learning, and research. They encourage knowledge and skill exchange among lecturers, foster cooperation and mutual learning. Democratic decision-making processes are in place for common activities. Policies related to rest, study and compensation for teaching hours, research hours and technology aim to promote personal and professional growth.

However, the academic environment remains somewhat formal making it challenging to accept differences and appreciation levels are not consistently high. Encouraging self-learning and research motivation should be a priority. In addition, it is necessary to create a mechanism to encourage scientific research and provide necessary support for researchers but it is necessary to reduce overly detailed control procedures, especially financial spending procedures.

In practice, universities demonstrate concern by implementing regulations on salary, allowances and seniority benefits. Each university also has specific policies for staff, including additional monthly income, holiday benefits, training support and commendations. Despite these efforts, limited financial resources result in relatively low actual staff income which may not be attractive to many individuals.

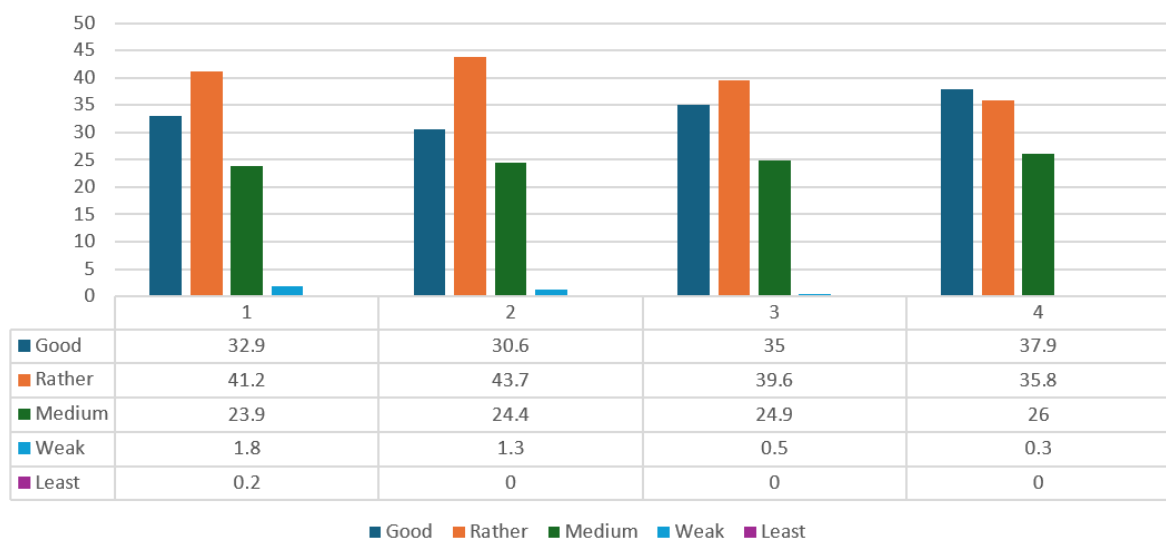


Figure 4. Illustrates the frequency of comments on creating a human resource environment.

4.6. Current Status of Inspection, Supervision, and Evaluation of Human Resource Development Results

The inspection, supervision, and evaluation of the results of human resource development help the principal to timely grasp the situation of human resource development to make improvements, and enhancements and direct the development of human resources more effectively and appropriately. The current status of inspection, supervision, and evaluation of results is surveyed according to the following 5 items (see Table 8):

- Item 1. Establishing standards and criteria to serve the activities of inspection, supervision and evaluation of results.
- Item 2. Specific assignment and decentralization of activities to inspect, supervise, and evaluate human resource development activities.
- Item 3. Building a two-way directive and reporting information channel.

- *Item 4.* Collecting and processing information to make timely management decisions.
- *Item 5.* Regularly organizing preliminary and final summaries to evaluate the implementation results.

Table 8. Current status of inspection, supervision and evaluation of human resource development results.

Items	Managers		Lecturers		Experts		Overall	
	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations	Average values	Standard deviations
1	3.97	0.824	4.16	0.806	4.12	0.806	4.10	0.815
2	3.97	0.824	4.13	0.840	4.15	0.794	4.09	0.829
3	3.99	0.822	4.14	0.830	4.17	0.828	4.10	0.830
4	3.96	0.843	4.09	0.829	4.13	0.820	4.06	0.833
5	3.96	0.841	4.11	0.811	4.14	0.799	4.07	0.820

The survey results in [Table 8](#) show that the inspection, supervision, and evaluation of the results of human resource development at universities are rated as fairly good with an overall average value of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 0.825. The average values of the items range from 4.06 to 4.10 and standard deviations from 0.815 to 0.833. Regarding the indicators in the frequency of evaluation, all items have a weak evaluation rate ranging from 1.0% - to 1.6%. The items “specific assignment and decentralization of activities to inspect, supervise and evaluate human resource development activities” and “building a directive and reporting information channel” have a poor evaluation rate of 0.1%. Compared to the surveyed content on human resource management, the content of inspection, supervision, and evaluation of the results of human resource development has the highest proportion of average evaluations accounting for 26.08%. This can be explained that the organization of inspection, supervision, and evaluation of the results of human resource development at public universities in the Mekong Delta region has not been really good or clear and has not used the collected information of the results of inspection, supervision and evaluation of the results of human resource development to make timely management decisions.

The survey results regarding the status of inspection, supervision and evaluation activities related to human resource development align relatively well with the findings from in-depth interviews. Specifically, when asked about their opinions on these activities, respondents provided the following insights: 1) The university has established a reasonably comprehensive system for inspecting, supervising and evaluating human resource development outcomes. This system includes defined procedures, protocols, and forms. 2) Regular inspection and supervision processes are in place. 3) University leaders demonstrate genuine concern for organizing effective inspection, supervision, and evaluation activities. 4) University evaluates various phases, including recruitment planning, training programs, and fostering initiatives. They also review and develop new training programs.

However, the effectiveness of the system for inspecting, monitoring, and evaluating human resource development outcomes remains suboptimal. These processes sometimes appear overly formal and mechanistic. Furthermore, the evaluation results have not been effectively utilized to enhance the quality of human resource development. This observation aligns with a common management issue where evaluation outcomes are detached from practical utilization, diminishing their inherent significance.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In recent years, the government has given proactive authority to public universities in the Mekong Delta region to control organizational and personnel issues through the university autonomy mechanism. These universities have followed established procedures for human resource management with most of them integrating human resource management practices into their institutional framework. Notably, they have made initial progress particularly in aligning workforce planning with development strategies to fulfill their vision and mission in response to fundamental educational reforms. However, universities must address existing deficiencies in human resource management to meet the evolving demands of education. First and foremost, institutions need to raise

awareness about the pivotal role of workforce planning. They should explore innovative solutions to empower autonomy in building a faculty that is not only adequately sized but also well-structured and high-quality. Revising recruitment criteria and processes, increasing efforts to attract talent and ensuring appropriate work assignments are priorities. Accurate performance evaluation is equally crucial. Recognizing effective contributors and constructively addressing underperformers will optimize human management outcomes. Furthermore, universities should innovate their training and development approaches emphasizing lifelong learning for teachers. Creating a work environment that fosters learning, respects diverse perspectives and celebrates talent is essential.

Regular assessments of human management development activities are recommended for continually improving practices. These efforts are particularly relevant in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Macro-level policies should be considered to support these initiatives:

i. **Enhancing University Autonomy:** Delegate more than decision-making authority to universities by reducing bureaucratic hurdles in recruitment, evaluation, utilization, promotion and disciplinary processes. Simultaneously, allocate financial resources to empower universities in attracting, retaining and nurturing talented individuals.

ii. **Capacity Building for University Administrators:** Develop training programs to enhance awareness, update knowledge and build managerial competencies among university council members and other administrative positions.

iii. **Deploy Human Resources Management Process throughout the System:** Ensure all universities implement human resource development activities consistently by integrating human resource management processes into organizational operations. Organize evaluations and learn from experience at each university and the entire industry every year.

iv. **Support for Challenging Regions:** Tailor policies to provide resources and operational mechanisms for universities in less advantaged regions, such as the Mekong Delta to exercise autonomy effectively.

In a nutshell, Vietnamese universities must embrace human resource management sustainability as a strategic imperative. By implementing these recommendations, they can navigate the complexities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and contribute significantly to educational excellence.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire about the 6-step human resource management process.

Ability components	Variables	Rating levels				
		1 (Least)	2 (Weak)	3 (Medium)	4 (Rather)	5 (Good)
1. Human resource planning (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a human resource development plan for the university for a period of 5 to 10 years. • The content of the human resource development plan is consistent with the university's development strategy, planning, and legal regulations. • Analyze and evaluate the human resources of the previous stage fully and accurately. • Develop a vision, objectives, and indicators for appropriate human resource development. • Solutions for human resource development are feasible and suitable for practice. • Assign and delegate the implementation of measures and solutions for appropriate human resource development. • Develop a job position project that is consistent with human resource planning. • Develop an annual human resource development plan to meet training requirements. 					
2. Human resource recruitment (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recruitment of staff is based on job requirements, job positions, occupational title standards, and the university's salary fund. • The level of implementation of promotional and recruitment activities. • The level of implementation of selection and recruitment of human resources. • The current status of making decisions on recruiting human resources. • Organizing the evaluation of 					

	effectiveness after recruitment activities.					
3. Human resource utilization and evaluation (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reasonableness of the arrangement and utilization of human resources. • The degree of compatibility of the workload with the working time of employees. • The suitability of the recruitment position and the tasks assigned to employees. • Is the staffing arrangement and organization consistent with the capabilities, strengths, and aspirations of each employee? • The organization of regular or sudden evaluation of human resources. • The criteria and standards for evaluating human resources are regularly reviewed and improved. • Results of human resource assessment are used effectively to promote the universities's development. 					
4. Training and fostering human resources (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying training and and fostering needs. • Defining training and and fostering objectives. • Developing detailed training and and fostering plans. • Implementing training and and fostering. • Evaluating the effectiveness and results of training and and fostering. 					
5. Establishing environment and policies for human resource development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wage payment policy. • The attractiveness of the job. • A consensus working environment, self-learning, support, and sharing. • Providing favorable conditions for staff to complete their tasks. 					
6. Inspection, supervision, and evaluation of human resource development results (5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing standards and criteria to serve the activities of inspection, supervision, and evaluation of results. • Specific assignment and decentralization of activities to inspect, supervise, and evaluate human resource development activities. • Building a two-way directive and reporting information channel. • Collecting and processing information to make timely management decisions. • Regularly organizing preliminary and final summaries to evaluate the implementation results. 					

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