



Private Higher Education in Vietnam: History, Current Status, and Development Directions

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ABSTRACT

Private higher education has become an increasingly important component of Vietnam's higher education system, contributing to expanded access, institutional diversification, and workforce development. This study presents a structured literature review of the historical development, policy environment, current status, and future directions of private higher education in Vietnam. Drawing on scholarly publications, policy documents, and reports published between 1990 and 2024, the review synthesizes evidence using a thematic analytical framework. The findings suggest that private higher education has expanded significantly in response to higher education massification, policy reforms, and labor market demands. The sector has diversified academic programs and increased educational opportunities, but continues to face challenges related to governance, quality assurance, financial sustainability, and institutional reputation. The review highlights the importance of policy support, institutional capacity building, and internationalization in enhancing the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the sector. By integrating historical, policy, and institutional perspectives, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the evolving role of private higher education in Vietnam and offers implications for future policy and practice.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, Vietnam's higher education system has undergone substantial expansion and transformation, driven by socio-economic reforms, globalization, and increasing demand for tertiary education. While public universities have traditionally dominated the system, private higher education (PHE) has gradually emerged as an important component of the national higher education landscape, contributing to expanded access, institutional diversification, and greater responsiveness to labor market demands (Chau et al., 2022a; Do, 2023).

The emergence of PHE in Vietnam reflects broader changes associated with the *Đổi mới* reforms and the state's increasing emphasis on the community participation in education. Since the 1990s, private institutions have played a growing role in addressing limitations in public university capacity, introducing flexible and practice-oriented academic programs, and supporting workforce development in a rapidly modernizing economy (Nguyen, 2022; Chau et al., 2022b). Compared with many public institutions, private universities have often demonstrated greater adaptability in curriculum innovation, industry collaboration, and technology-enhanced learning models.

Nevertheless, the development of PHE in Vietnam remains uneven and contested. Existing literature highlights persistent challenges related to governance structures, ownership models, quality assurance, financial sustainability, and public perceptions of institutional legitimacy (Chau et al., 2022a; Gottschalk & Weise, 2023). In particular,

tensions between market-oriented expansion and educational quality continue to drive debates regarding the long-term sustainability and social role of PHE within Vietnam's socialist-oriented market economy.

Given these ongoing transformations, a comprehensive review of the development trajectory, current conditions, and future directions of PHE in Vietnam is both timely and necessary. This study therefore synthesizes existing literature and policy developments to examine the historical evolution, institutional characteristics, challenges, and strategic prospects of the sector within the broader context of national higher education reform and global integration.

This literature review addresses the following research questions:

1. How has PHE evolved within Vietnam's changing socio-economic and policy context since the *Đổi mới* reforms?
2. What are the major characteristics of PHE in Vietnam in terms of institutional development, enrollment patterns, program diversification, governance, and quality assurance?
3. What structural challenges and emerging opportunities currently shape the development of Vietnam's PHE sector?
4. What policy and institutional strategies are necessary to enhance the sustainability, quality, and global competitiveness of PHE in Vietnam?

These questions guide the thematic organization and analytical synthesis of the review.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a structured literature review approach informed by the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to synthesize and critically examine the historical development, current status, and future directions of PHE in Vietnam. Given the multifaceted nature of the topic, the review integrates scholarly literature, policy documents, and institutional reports to provide a comprehensive understanding of the sector's evolution, governance, and development trajectories.

2.1. Literature Search Strategy

Relevant literature published between 1990 and 2024 was identified through searches of major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and ERIC. To capture policy developments and institutional perspectives, the review also included official publications from the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the World Bank, UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the ASEAN University Network (AUN).

The search process employed combinations of keywords and Boolean operators, including:

- “private higher education” OR “non-public university”
- “private university” AND Vietnam
- “higher education reform” AND Vietnam
- “higher education governance”
- “quality assurance”
- “internationalization”
- “digital transformation”
- “higher education policy”

Search terms were refined iteratively to improve relevance and ensure adequate coverage of both national and international scholarship related to private higher education.

2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the reviewed literature, the following inclusion criteria were applied:

- studies focusing on private higher education in Vietnam;
- comparative studies of private higher education systems in Asia with implications for Vietnam;
- empirical, conceptual, and policy-oriented studies addressing governance, finance, quality assurance, institutional development, enrollment, internationalization, or higher education reform;

- publications in English or Vietnamese;
- peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books and book chapters, policy reports, and official government documents.

Studies were excluded if they:

- focused exclusively on public universities without providing insights relevant to private higher education;
- consisted of opinion pieces, news articles, promotional materials, or unverified online sources;
- duplicated findings already represented in the selected literature;
- lacked sufficient analytical content or methodological transparency.

2.3. Literature Screening and Selection

The identification and selection of literature followed the key stages recommended in the PRISMA framework, including identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). Titles and abstracts were initially reviewed to determine relevance to the study objectives. Full-text publications were subsequently assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Particular attention was given to studies addressing:

- the historical evolution of private higher education in Vietnam;
- policy and regulatory developments;
- governance and institutional management;
- quality assurance and accreditation;
- internationalization and digital transformation;
- future challenges and development strategies.

The figure below summarizes the procedures used to identify, screen, assess, and select relevant literature included in this review, following the key stages recommended by the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021).

Figure 1 presents the literature selection process adopted in this study. Consistent with PRISMA 2020 principles, the review involved four stages: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. Given the exploratory and integrative nature of the review, the figure illustrates the selection process rather than reporting a formal systematic review with exhaustive database retrieval.

2.4. Data Analysis and Synthesis

The selected literature was analyzed using thematic synthesis, allowing evidence from diverse sources to be integrated into a coherent analytical framework. The review was organized around four interrelated themes:

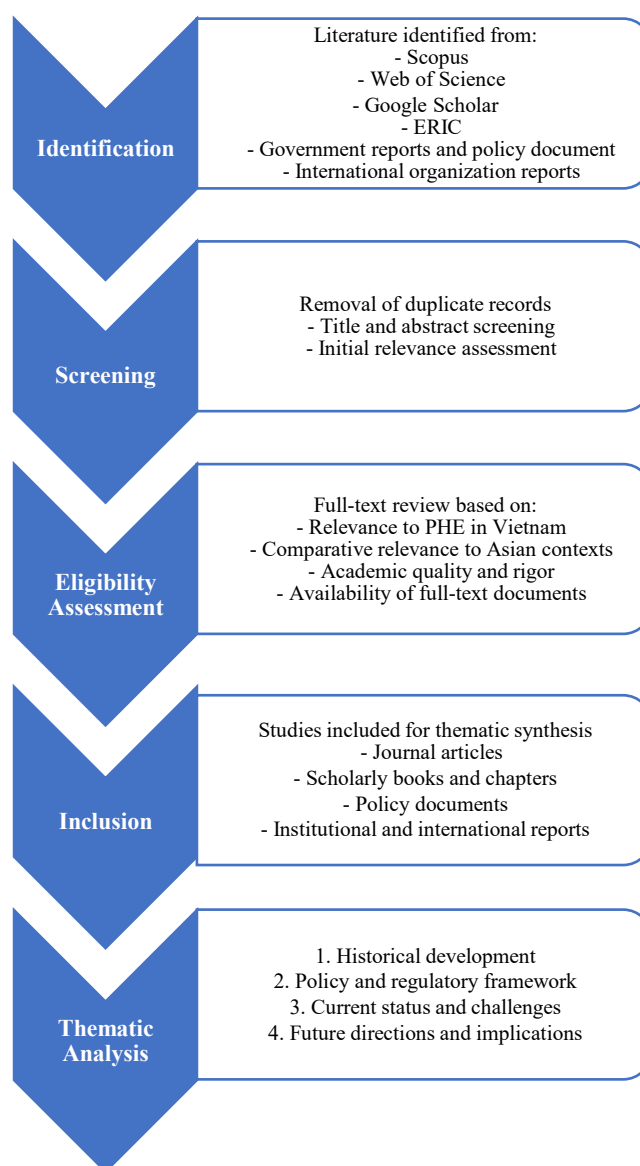


Figure 1. Literature Selection Process Based on PRISMA Principles

(1) Historical development of private higher education, examining major phases of institutional and policy evolution;

(2) Policy and regulatory framework, focusing on governance reforms, institutional autonomy, and quality assurance mechanisms;

(3) Current status and institutional landscape, including enrollment patterns, program diversification, governance structures, and emerging challenges;

(4) Future directions and implications, addressing policy priorities, institutional strategies, internationalization, and sustainable development.

Through this analytical framework, the review identifies major trends, policy shifts, institutional transformations, and research gaps that have shaped the development of private higher education in Vietnam and may influence its future trajectory.

3. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

PHE in Vietnam has evolved from a marginal sector in the early years of educational reform into an important component of the national higher education system. To analyze this development, the study draws primarily on historical institutionalism and higher education governance perspectives, supplemented by insights from the economics of education.

Historical institutionalism provides a useful lens for examining how policy reforms, regulatory changes, and state governance structures have shaped the evolution of PHE over time. This perspective highlights the role of critical policy milestones - such as the Education Law (2005), the Law on Higher Education (2012, amended 2018), and recent higher education reforms - in influencing institutional growth, governance arrangements, and sectoral transformation.

The governance perspective emphasizes the importance of institutional autonomy, accountability, strategic management, and quality assurance in determining the effectiveness and sustainability of private universities. As Vietnamese higher education becomes increasingly competitive and internationally connected, governance capacity has become a key factor influencing institutional performance and legitimacy (Parajuli et al., 2020; World Bank, 2020).

From the economics of education perspective, PHE contributes to the mobilization of private investment, expansion of educational opportunities, and diversification of funding sources, thereby reducing pressure on public resources while responding to growing demand for tertiary education (Pham & Fry, 2002).

Drawing on these perspectives, the review adopts a three-dimensional analytical framework comprising: Historical development, examining major policy and institutional phases in the evolution of PHE; Current status, assessing institutional scale, governance, quality assurance, contributions, and challenges; Future directions, analyzing policy priorities and strategic pathways for sustainable development in the context of internationalization and digital transformation.

This framework provides a coherent basis for synthesizing the literature and examining the development trajectory of private higher education in Vietnam.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Historical Development of Private Higher Education

The development of PHE in Vietnam can be divided into four major phases based on significant transformations in state policy, governance structures, regulatory frameworks, and institutional characteristics. Rather than relying solely on chronological distinctions, this periodization reflects the evolving role of PHE within Vietnam's broader socio-economic reforms and higher education modernization agenda. This historical periodization is informed by historical institutionalism, which emphasizes how policy shifts and institutional reforms shape the evolution of educational systems over time. Each phase represents a distinct stage in terms of policy orientation, institutional expansion, governance practices, quality assurance mechanisms, and international integration. Such a framework enables a more systematic understanding of how Vietnamese PHE has evolved from an experimental educational model into an increasingly professionalized and globally connected sector. Four key phases can be identified:

Phase 1: Emergence and Experimental Formation (1988-1993)

The establishment of Thang Long people-founded University (Đại học Dân lập Thăng Long) in 1988, the first non-public higher education institution in Vietnam, marked the sector's start. At that time “private” was an avoidable and sensitive educational term nationwide; synonyms such as non-public, non-state, people-founded were used instead. During this pilot phase, those non-public institutions relied primarily on social capital to meet immediate workforce demands in the emerging market economy. The absence of formal legal frameworks meant operations were largely community-driven and ad hoc (Kelly, 2000).

Phase 2: Rapid Expansion and Regulatory Fragmentation (1994-2005)

The rapid increase in non-state institutions reflected growing societal demand for the socialization of higher education. However, this expansion also exposed persistent challenges, including limited infrastructure, weak governance capacity, and uneven academic quality (Parajuli et al., 2020). An important milestone during this period was the establishment of Thanh Do Private College of Technology in 2004, which represented one of the earliest officially recognized uses of the term “private” (*tu thực*) within Vietnam’s education system. Although the institution was initially established as a college rather than a university, it was later upgraded to Thanh Do University, reflecting the broader institutional evolution of Vietnam’s PHE sector. This transition was further reinforced by the promulgation of Decision No. 14/2005/QĐ-TTg on the Regulations on the Organization and Operation of Private Universities (PMV, 2005), which established a more formal legal framework for PHE. The regulation clarified governance structures, stakeholder responsibilities, and operational mechanisms, thereby laying an important institutional foundation for the subsequent expansion and professionalization of the sector.

Phase 3: Institutional Formalization and Professional Governance (2006-2018)

The 2005 Education Law and the 2012 Law on Higher Education formally recognized private universities as an integral part of the national higher education system, thereby integrating previously semi-public institutions into the PHE category. During this phase, several private colleges were upgraded to universities; for instance, Thanh Do College of Technology was elevated to Thanh Do University in 2009, reflecting both institutional expansion and enhanced status. Prominent institutions such as FPT University, Hoa Sen University, and Thang Long University exemplify this trend, demonstrating professionalized governance structures, strategic branding, and improved academic quality (Tran & Marginson, 2018).

Phase 4: Global Integration and Digital Transformation (2019-Present)

The 2018 amended Law on Higher Education (effective in 2019) expanded institutional autonomy, encouraging private universities to integrate more actively into regional and global higher education networks. Earlier studies had already highlighted the growing importance of non-profit governance models and private-sector investment in strengthening institutional sustainability and governance effectiveness within Vietnam’s PHE sector (Hayden & Lam, 2007; Nguyen, 2015). Since 2019, these trends have become increasingly visible through governance reforms, diversification of institutional funding, expanding international partnerships, and greater emphasis on accountability and innovation (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2023). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation, enabling private institutions to rapidly implement online learning, hybrid instruction, and technology-enhanced pedagogical models (Le et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2024).

In short, PHE in Vietnam has evolved from a community-based experimental model into a significant component of the national tertiary education system, contributing to resource diversification, competitive quality enhancement, and expanded access to higher education.

4.2. Policy and Regulatory Framework

The development of PHE in Vietnam has been largely shaped by the evolution of the country’s policy and regulatory framework. Since the introduction of the *Đổi mới* reforms, government policies have gradually transformed PHE from an experimental and loosely regulated sector into a formally recognized component of the national higher education system. Changes in legislation, governance mechanisms, and quality assurance policies have played a decisive role in defining institutional autonomy, organizational structures, and the relationship between the state and non-public universities.

During the initial phase of emergence and experimental formation (1988-1993), PHE operated under limited and fragmented regulations. Early non-public institutions were established primarily in response to increasing social demand for tertiary education and constraints in state funding. However, legal recognition and governance structures remained unclear, reflecting the cautious approach of the state toward educational privatization.

In the subsequent phase of rapid expansion and regulatory fragmentation (1994-2005), the government gradually introduced legal instruments to accommodate the growing number of non-public institutions. The Education Law of 1998 represented an important milestone by formally acknowledging non-public educational models, including people-founded and semi-public universities. Nevertheless, regulatory inconsistencies persisted, particularly regarding ownership structures, governance authority, and financial mechanisms. During this period, many institutions relied heavily on tuition fees while operating within an evolving and sometimes ambiguous policy environment.

A more systematic regulatory framework emerged during the phase of institutional formalization and professional governance (2006-2018). Decision No. 14/2005/QĐ-TTg established the charter for people-founded and private universities, clarifying organizational structures, governance responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms. More importantly, the Law on Higher Education (No. 08/2012/QH13) creates a comprehensive legal foundation for Vietnam's higher education system, applying to both public and private institutions. This law strengthens state oversight while simultaneously promoting institutional modernization, quality assurance, and governance professionalization.

The amended Higher Education Law of 2018 (Law No. 34/2018/QH14), which marked the beginning of the current phase of global integration and digital transformation (2019-present), significantly expands university autonomy in academic affairs, personnel management, finance, and international cooperation. The revised legislation also emphasizes accountability, transparency, and stakeholder engagement, reflecting broader trends toward modern university governance and international integration (Do, 2023; NAV, 2012, 2018).

Alongside legislative reforms, national policy resolutions have further reinforced the strategic role of PHE. Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW on fundamental and comprehensive educational reform (CPV, 2013) and Resolution No. 19-NQ/TW on public sector reform and institutional autonomy (CPV, 2017) established important policy orientations for expanding non-public higher education and enhancing institutional self-governance. More recently, Resolution No. 68-NQ/TW (CPV, 2023) explicitly identified PHE as a key contributor to innovation, human resource development, and the transition toward a knowledge-based economy.

Quality assurance has also become an increasingly important component of the regulatory framework. Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDĐT institutionalized mandatory accreditation cycles for higher education institutions, while program-level accreditation has been promoted through both national agencies and international frameworks such as the ASEAN University Network - Quality Assurance (AUN-QA). These developments reflect Vietnam's broader effort to align its higher education system with regional and global standards, although disparities in implementation capacity continue to exist across private institutions (MOET, 2017; AUN-QA, 2022).

Overall, the policy and regulatory evolution of PHE in Vietnam demonstrates a gradual transition from experimental establishment to institutional formalization, increased autonomy, and international integration. While the current framework provides greater opportunities for innovation, digital transformation, and global collaboration, ongoing challenges remain regarding financial sustainability, quality assurance, and equitable access across the sector.

4.3. Current Status of Private Higher Education in Vietnam

4.3.1. Institutional Landscape and System Expansion

PHE has become an increasingly important component of Vietnam's higher education system, contributing to the sector's expansion, diversification, and responsiveness to socio-economic change. Although public universities continue to dominate the system, private institutions now account for a substantial share of higher education enrollment and have expanded steadily in both institutional scale and program offerings (GSO, 2025).

The growth of PHE reflects broader policy objectives associated with higher education massification, educational socialization, and workforce development. Recent policy initiatives, particularly Decision No. 452/QĐ-TTg (2025), further position private universities as important contributors to achieving national targets for enrollment expansion, digital transformation, and human resource development in STEM-related fields. This policy orientation suggests a growing recognition of PHE as a strategic partner in Vietnam's transition toward a knowledge-based economy.

The literature indicates that private institutions have generally demonstrated greater flexibility in responding to changing labor market demands, particularly through the introduction of professionally oriented and industry-linked programs. However, the sector remains highly heterogeneous. While several established universities have strengthened their quality assurance systems, international partnerships, and institutional capacity, many smaller institutions continue to face challenges related to governance, faculty development, research productivity, and financial sustainability (World Bank, 2020; AUN-QA, 2022).

Rather than a uniform process of expansion, the development of PHE in Vietnam is increasingly characterized by institutional differentiation. The literature suggests that future sectoral growth will depend less on quantitative expansion and more on the ability of institutions to enhance academic quality, strengthen governance capacity, and establish distinctive institutional identities within an increasingly competitive higher education environment (Levy, 2018; Tran & Marginson, 2018).

4.3.2. Academic Programs, Pedagogical Innovation, and Quality Assurance

Academic diversification has become one of the defining characteristics of PHE in Vietnam. Most private institutions primarily offer undergraduate programs, while postgraduate education and doctoral training remain comparatively limited due to regulatory requirements, research capacity constraints, and shortages of qualified academic staff. Program offerings are strongly concentrated in disciplines closely linked to labor market demand, including business, information technology, finance, communication, tourism, healthcare, and applied sciences (GSO, 2025).

In recent years, private universities have increasingly differentiated themselves through pedagogical innovation and technology-enhanced learning models. Blended learning, online education platforms, learning management systems (LMS), competency-based curricula, and English-medium instruction have become more common, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid adoption of digital learning technologies accelerated institutional transformation and highlighted the relative agility of private institutions compared with more bureaucratically structured public universities.

Many private universities have also strengthened university-industry collaboration through internship programs, enterprise-sponsored laboratories, co-designed curricula, and experiential learning initiatives. These developments reflect a broader shift toward employability-oriented higher education and align with Vietnam's national digital transformation agenda and workforce modernization strategies.

Despite these advances, quality assurance remains one of the most critical challenges facing the sector. While institutional accreditation is mandatory under MOET regulations, implementation outcomes vary considerably across institutions. Leading universities have increasingly pursued external accreditation through national accreditation centers and regional frameworks such as AUN-QA, using quality assurance as a mechanism for branding and internationalization. However, smaller institutions often experience difficulties in meeting accreditation standards due to limitations in infrastructure, research output, faculty development, and governance capacity (AUN-QA, 2022; World Bank, 2020).

Research productivity also remains uneven across the sector. Although a number of private universities have expanded publication output and international collaboration, Vietnam's PHE system overall continues to be predominantly teaching-oriented rather than research-intensive. This reflects broader structural challenges related to funding mechanisms, research culture, faculty workload, and limited access to competitive research grants.

4.3.3. Student Enrollment, Equity, and Internationalization

PHE institutions currently serve a diverse student population concentrated primarily in major urban and industrialized regions such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, and Can Tho. Students are generally attracted to private universities because of their flexible admission policies, industry-oriented curricula, modern learning environments, international exposure, and relatively shorter administrative procedures.

At the same time, tuition-dependent financing models raise important concerns regarding educational equity and social inclusion. Compared with public universities, tuition fees at private institutions are substantially higher, potentially limiting access for students from lower-income or rural backgrounds. Although many institutions provide scholarships, installment payment schemes, and financial aid programs, disparities in access remain a persistent issue within the sector (Gottschalk & Weise, 2023).

Internationalization has become an increasingly important strategic orientation among leading private universities. Institutions have expanded international partnerships through dual-degree programs, student exchange initiatives, transnational education collaborations, and joint research activities. Some universities have also adopted English-medium instruction and recruited international faculty in order to improve global competitiveness and graduate employability. These developments align with broader national ambitions to integrate Vietnam more deeply into regional and global higher education networks.

However, the internationalization process remains uneven. While a small number of institutions possess the financial and organizational capacity to establish meaningful international collaborations, many others continue to struggle with language capacity, international branding, research visibility, and compliance with global quality standards.

Overall, the current status of PHE in Vietnam reflects both significant progress and persistent structural challenges. The sector has expanded rapidly in terms of enrollment, institutional diversity, and pedagogical innovation, while increasingly contributing to workforce development and educational access. Nevertheless, disparities in institutional quality, governance effectiveness, research capacity, financial sustainability, and equitable access continue to shape the uneven development trajectory of PHE in Vietnam.

4.3.4. Challenges and Opportunities for Private Higher Education in Vietnam

PHE in Vietnam has expanded significantly over the past two decades, but its growth track remains uneven due to persistent structural and policy-related challenges. At the same time, favorable policy reforms and rising demand for diversified educational opportunities create substantial openings for private universities to enhance their contribution to the national higher education system. This section reviews key challenges and emerging opportunities, drawing on recent policy documents, statistical data, and scholarly analyses.

(1) Challenges

Financial Sustainability and Equity

Private universities in Vietnam remain heavily reliant on tuition fees as their primary income source, with limited access to state subsidies, grants, or competitive research funding (GSO, 2023). This tuition-dependent model restricts institutional investment in faculty development, infrastructure, and research, while also raising concerns about affordability for students from low-income backgrounds. Studies show that without alternative income streams, such as endowments or industry-funded research, financial vulnerability will continue to constrain the sector's growth (World Bank, 2020; Tran & Marginson, 2018).

Quality Assurance and Institutional Capacity

Despite the introduction of accreditation systems and regional frameworks such as AUN-QA, many private universities struggle with uneven quality assurance implementation. Faculty qualifications remain a concern, with a relatively low proportion of staff holding doctoral degrees compared to public universities (Do, 2023). Research output and global university rankings also reveal limited competitiveness, which hampers the reputation and legitimacy of the PHE sector (Nguyen, 2024).

Competition with Public Universities

Public universities - particularly those with national status such as Vietnam National University Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City - benefit from state investment, research funding, and stronger brand recognition (Tran & Do, 2022). These advantages create unevenness in attracting high-achieving students, qualified faculty, and international partners, placing private universities at a structural disadvantage despite their institutional flexibility.

Regulatory and Governance Constraints

Although the 2018 amendment to the Law on Higher Education enhanced institutional autonomy, practical implementation remains constrained. Issues such as ownership rights, governance structures, and the balance between profit orientation and academic mission continue to trigger debate (Chau, 2022). Overlapping regulations and inconsistent enforcement also limit the ability of private institutions to exercise full autonomy in decision-making.

(2) Opportunities

Alignment with National Development Priorities

The Vietnamese government has explicitly acknowledged the role of PHE in meeting national human resource demands. Resolution No. 68-NQ/TW (2023) identifies non-public universities as critical in expanding access, supporting digital transformation, and fostering innovation. This recognition provides a stronger policy foundation for private institutions to contribute to national development goals.

Internationalization and Partnerships

Private universities increasingly pursue transnational education through joint degree programs, faculty mobility, and international accreditation. These initiatives enhance institutional visibility and competitiveness in the global education market, while also addressing domestic demand for high-quality, internationally recognized credentials (Tran & Marginson, 2018).

Niche Specialization and Market Responsiveness

Unlike public universities, private institutions are more attentive in designing new programs that align with market needs, particularly in emerging sectors such as information technology, health sciences, logistics, and creative industries (World Bank, 2020). Their capacity to rapidly adapt curricula, integrate digital platforms, and deliver English-medium instruction positions them to capture unmet demand in Vietnam's expanding higher education market.

Potential Policy and Financial Incentives

If Resolution No. 68-NQ/TW (2023) is operationalized into concrete measures - such as tax incentives, public-private research grants, and loan schemes for disadvantaged students - private universities may achieve greater financial sustainability and competitiveness. This evolving policy environment could narrow the gap between public and private institutions in terms of funding and legitimacy (GSO, 2023).

In brief, the Vietnamese PHE sector stands at a crossroads. Persistent challenges - including financial weakness, uneven quality assurance, and competition with public universities - pose significant constraints. However, opportunities arising from favorable policy directions, internationalization, and niche specialization present pathways for transformation. The extent to which private universities can control their governance flexibility, embrace innovation, and secure stronger state support will determine their role in shaping the future of higher education in Vietnam.

4.4. Future directions and implications for Private Higher Education in Vietnam

The future development of PHE in Vietnam will depend on the sector's ability to balance institutional autonomy, educational quality, financial sustainability, and international competitiveness within an increasingly market-oriented and digitalized higher education environment. Existing literature suggests that while private universities have demonstrated considerable flexibility and responsiveness to labor market demands, structural challenges related to governance, uneven quality, and resource limitations continue to constrain long-term sustainability.

4.4.1. Governance Reform and Financial Sustainability

One of the most critical issues facing Vietnamese private universities is financial dependence on tuition revenue. Compared with PHE systems in countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, Vietnam has yet to establish sufficiently diversified funding mechanisms, including competitive research grants, philanthropic endowments, and large-scale public-private partnerships (Mok, 2016; World Bank, 2020). As enrollment competition intensifies due to demographic shifts and expanding public-sector autonomy, tuition-centered financial models may become increasingly vulnerable.

Future policy reforms should therefore focus on strengthening governance transparency, clarifying ownership structures, and expanding equitable access to national research funding for private institutions. Greater policy consistency regarding institutional autonomy and accountability is also necessary to reduce administrative ambiguity and encourage long-term strategic investment.

At the institutional level, private universities need to adopt more entrepreneurial governance models by strengthening industry partnerships, expanding continuing education programs, and investing in applied research and innovation ecosystems. Such strategies may improve both financial resilience and institutional legitimacy within Vietnam's increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

4.4.2. Quality Assurance, Research Capacity, and Internationalization

Quality assurance will remain a decisive factor shaping the future competitiveness of PHE in Vietnam. Although accreditation frameworks have expanded significantly under recent higher education reforms, disparities in implementation capacity continue to exist across institutions. The literature increasingly emphasizes that quality assurance should move beyond procedural compliance toward continuous quality enhancement, international benchmarking, and outcome-based evaluation.

In this context, alignment with regional frameworks such as AUN-QA and broader ASEAN qualification mechanisms may strengthen institutional credibility, student mobility, and graduate employability. However, internationalization should not be understood merely as symbolic global engagement. Instead, sustainable internationalization requires deeper integration of international research collaboration, English-medium instruction, curriculum modernization, and faculty development strategies.

Research capacity also remains uneven across the sector. While several leading private universities have improved publication output and international visibility, many institutions continue to prioritize teaching functions

due to limited resources and insufficient doctoral-level faculty. Long-term competitiveness will therefore depend on strategic investment in research ecosystems, faculty development, and international academic networks.

4.4.3. Digital Transformation, Equity, and Social Responsibility

The acceleration of digital transformation following the COVID-19 pandemic has created both opportunities and challenges for PHE institutions. Compared with public universities, many private institutions have demonstrated greater adaptability in implementing online learning platforms, blended learning models, and technology-enhanced teaching approaches. This flexibility may become a strategic advantage as Vietnam transitions toward a digital and knowledge-based economy.

Nevertheless, digital transformation also raises concerns regarding educational equity and institutional stratification. Significant disparities persist in technological infrastructure, digital literacy, and access to high-quality learning environments, particularly among students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Without adequate policy support and inclusive institutional strategies, the expansion of PHE may unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities in educational opportunity.

Consequently, future development strategies should emphasize not only innovation and competitiveness but also social responsibility, inclusive access, and sustainable human capital development. The long-term legitimacy of PHE in Vietnam will increasingly depend on its ability to balance market responsiveness with broader educational and societal goals.

5. CONCLUSION

PHE has evolved from an experimental educational model into an increasingly important component of Vietnam's higher education system. Over the past three decades, the sector has expanded substantially in institutional scale, program diversification, and international engagement, supported by gradual policy reforms and growing societal demand for tertiary education.

Despite this progress, major challenges remain regarding governance quality, financial sustainability, research capacity, and equitable access. Institutional disparities within the sector continue to shape uneven development trajectories, particularly between leading private universities and smaller institutions with limited resources.

The literature suggests that the future sustainability of PHE in Vietnam will depend on the effective interaction between state policy reform and institutional innovation. Strengthening governance frameworks, improving quality assurance systems, expanding international collaboration, and promoting inclusive digital transformation will be essential for enhancing both competitiveness and social legitimacy. If these challenges are addressed strategically, private universities may play an increasingly significant role in supporting Vietnam's transition toward a knowledge-based economy and deeper global integration.

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