

Assessing the Level of Application of Management Accounting at Local Universities in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: This study was conducted to assess the level of application of management accounting (MA) at 26 local universities in Vietnam in the context of university autonomy. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, data were collected through 86 valid survey forms from chief accountants, heads of planning and finance departments, and accounting staff, along with in-depth interviews with 6 experts. The survey results show that the application of cost management accounting at universities has made certain progress, especially in identifying costs by function, synthesizing periodic reports, and initially assigning cost management responsibilities to affiliated units. However, many core contents are still limited, such as classifying fixed and variable costs, determining controllable and uncontrollable costs, analyzing costs for strategic decisions, and building scientific estimates. On that basis, the study proposes advanced solutions such as: perfecting the mechanism for classifying and recording costs; Strengthening the development of scientific norms and estimates; standardizing the method of calculating the cost of training services; promoting cost analysis and forecasting; perfecting the management accounting reporting system; and improving human resource capacity and technology application. The research results contribute to supplementing empirical evidence on the current state of cost accounting in Vietnamese higher education, while suggesting directions for improvement to meet the requirements of financial management in the context of autonomy and international integration.

KEYWORDS: Management accounting, local universities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam currently has 244 higher education institutions, of which 172 are public; of which 26 are local universities (11%). Local universities are under the management and operation of the People's Committees of provinces or cities, and are also subject to professional coordination by the Ministry of Education and Training. These schools play an important role in the higher education system, contributing to training human resources to meet the socio-economic development needs of each region. Currently, the network of local universities is increasingly expanding, mainly concentrated in provinces and cities outside the major economic center areas. Local universities are multidisciplinary public universities that also have the function of cooperation and technology transfer to solve urgent problems of localities and businesses; are centers for scientific research, technology transfer and local cultural centers (Dang Van Dinh, 2021). Most local universities are small and medium-sized, with limited facilities and financial resources compared to national key universities; they are multidisciplinary training institutions, meeting local human resource needs in fields such as economics, engineering, agriculture, health and education. The proportion of students studying at local universities is relatively high, mainly students from the province and students from neighboring provinces (Kim Minh Chau, 2024).

In the current period, local universities are making efforts to ensure their regular revenues and expenditures according to Decree 60/2021/ND-CP of the Government on the financial autonomy mechanism of public service units. Universities are supported by the government's policies on financial autonomy and higher education development, and have many advantages in cooperating with local enterprises to train according to the actual needs of the labor market. Therefore, these universities are able to apply modern management models, including cost management accounting, to improve operational efficiency (Tran Thi My Chau, 2014). However, schools also face many difficulties and challenges such as budget constraints, leading to difficulties in investing in infrastructure and improving teaching quality. In addition, schools also face competition with large universities,

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especially in attracting high-quality lecturers and good students. At the same time, the financial management and accounting systems are not synchronized, affecting the efficiency of resource use (Dang Xuan Huy et al., 2022).

In that context, MA is increasingly considered an essential management tool, supporting schools in financial planning, cost control, performance evaluation and strategic decision making. For local universities, the role of MA becomes even more important when they have to ensure training tasks to serve local socio-economic development while facing limitations in budget, facilities and human resources. MA helps schools analyze training costs by industry and program; build estimates and control expenditures; and establish responsibility centers to link authority with financial responsibility. In the context of implementing the autonomy mechanism according to Decree 60/2021/ND-CP, the application and completion of the MA system is not only an urgent requirement to improve the efficiency of resource use, but also a solution for schools to increase transparency, improve competitiveness, and better meet the needs of society and local businesses.

In reality, the level of MA application at local universities in Vietnam is currently limited. Some universities have initially deployed tools such as budgeting, cost-income difference analysis, responsibility reporting and cost allocation by unit, but mainly stop at the level of "financial accounting support" rather than a complete MA system. The establishment of responsibility centers is not popular, management information for decision-making is still fragmented, lacks timeliness (Küpper, H. U., 2013). In addition, many universities still consider MA as a supplementary activity instead of a strategic management tool, leading to low efficiency in controlling and using resources (T.T. M. Chau, 2014, L.T.T. Oanh et al., 2024).

Researching and evaluating the level of MA application not only helps identify gaps in implementation practices, but also provides a basis for proposing solutions to improve the MA system, contributing to improving the financial management efficiency and competitiveness of local universities.

2. THEORETICAL BASIS OF MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTING AT UNIVERSITIES

MA in higher education institutions plays an important role in providing information for planning, control, evaluation and decision making. Especially at local universities – which have the characteristics of limited financial resources, small and medium scale – MA helps administrators use resources effectively, improve transparency and ensure financial autonomy. The basic contents of cost MA can be systematized in the following aspects:

2.1. Cost identification and classification

Cost identification and classification is an important initial step to create information for budgeting, cost-benefit analysis and operation control (Horngren, Datar & Rajan, 2015). According to Drury (2018), Phong, T. T. T. et al. (2023), the method of cost classification depends on the management objective, so an appropriate classification system will help managers not only track the costs incurred but also control the efficiency of resource use. In the higher education environment, especially at local universities that are under pressure to be financially autonomous, scientific cost classification is even more necessary to make resources transparent, assign cost responsibilities to each faculty, and support the construction of reasonable tuition fees. There are 3 basic cost classification criteria commonly applied in the education sector:

- By operational function: including training costs, scientific research costs, administrative management costs.
- By relationship with the volume of activities: including fixed costs (not changing according to the number of students such as salaries of permanent lecturers, depreciation of facilities) and variable costs (increasing or decreasing according to the scale of training, such as learning materials, electricity and water costs).
- According to controllability: divided into controllable costs (decided by faculties and departments, such as teaching material costs) and uncontrollable costs (determined by State regulations or the Provincial People's Committee) (Phong, T. T. T. et al, 2023).

From this theoretical basis, it is possible to build a scale to assess the level of application of cost identification and classification at local universities. The scales as follows: (1) The university clearly distinguishes training, scientific research, and administrative management costs; (2) Cost information is aggregated by function and reported periodically; (3) The university clearly identifies fixed and variable costs in training; (4) The university identifies controllable and uncontrollable costs in each faculty/department; (5) The university assigns responsibility for cost management to faculties (cost centers). (Vale, J. et al., 2022; Marlina, E. et al., 2020; Hutaibat, K. et al., 2020; Chang, H. C. et al., 2024; Giménez, V. M., et a., 2006; Tartari, V. et al., 2012).

2.2. Establishing standard cost and budgeting

Establishing standard cost and budgeting are considered the core tools for financial planning and control. Standard costs reflect the reasonable consumption level of each production-service factor for a unit of product or service, while cost budgets are financial plans built on the basis of standards and operational forecasts. For higher education institutions, standards are often associated with indicators such as the number of standard teaching hours, average training costs per student, or the cost of

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implementing a scientific research topic. According to Drury (2018), establishing standards and estimates is not only an accounting technique, but also a management tool to help allocate resources according to strategic goals, control costs incurred compared to the plan, and evaluate the management effectiveness of each unit. For local universities in Vietnam – which must self-finance part or all of their regular expenditures according to Decree 60/2021/ND-CP – the development of norms and estimates becomes even more urgent to ensure a balance between revenue and expenditure, increase transparency and enhance accountability.

To assess the level of application of this content at local universities, the following specific scales can be developed: (1) The university issues training cost norms for each major and each level; (2) The university applies standard teaching hour norms for lecturers; (3) The university develops cost norms for scientific research activities and training support services; (4) The university reviews and updates cost norms according to changes in the socio-economic environment; (5) The university develops annual revenue and expenditure estimates for each faculty and training major; (6) The university prepares detailed estimates for scientific research and technology transfer activities; (7) The university prepares an estimate of administrative and management costs; (8) The university prepares an estimate based on trend analysis and enrollment size forecast. (Hutaibat, K. et al., 2020; Chang, H. C. et al., 2024; Yamamoto, K., 2010; Beamer, S. A., 2011; Yu, P., 2021).

2.3. Recording costs and calculating service costs

In the process of cost accounting and calculating training costs, recording costs plays an important role in accurately reflecting the expenses incurred in higher education activities. According to management accounting theory, all expenses related to the process of providing training services and scientific research need to be collected, classified and allocated reasonably before calculating training costs. Recording costs fully and accurately not only helps schools determine the correct cost of tuition units, training programs or research topics, but also serves as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of budget use, preparing management reports and supporting development policy planning.

To evaluate the cost recording and costing in universities, the study uses the following scales: (1) Incurred costs are fully recorded both directly (lecturer salaries, learning materials, exam organization) and indirectly (management, depreciation of assets); (2) Costs are recorded for the correct subjects, accounting period, value and in accordance with legal documents; (3) Costs are recorded promptly when incurred to serve management reporting and budget adjustment; (4) Costs included in costing are reasonable and valid according to accounting standards and spending regulations; (5) Indirect costs are allocated according to scientific and reasonable criteria (number of students, teaching hours, area). These scales allow to evaluate the reliability, transparency and effectiveness of the cost accounting system in universities, and point out the limitations so that measures can be taken to improve the method of calculating training costs (Chang, H. C. et al., 2024; Abu-Tapanjeh, A. M., 2008; Kont, K. R., 2011).

2.4. Cost information analysis

In the context of university autonomy and increasing competition, cost information analysis has become an important step in MA of higher education institutions. Not only stopping at recording training, research and management costs, schools need to conduct in-depth analysis to evaluate the efficiency of resource use, as a basis for strategic planning, adjusting tuition fees, and allocating reasonable budgets. The content of cost analysis at universities often focuses on:

- Comparing actual costs with estimates: For example, comparing the cost of organizing a course (including guest lecturer remuneration, costs of learning materials, electricity and water for teaching) with the initial estimate.
- Analyzing cost structure: Considering the proportion of costs for training, scientific research, international cooperation activities, management and student support services.
- Cost fluctuation analysis: Assess the change in costs according to the scale of training (number of students, number of new majors), especially in the context of expanding high-quality training and online training.
- Cost-volume-tuition relationship analysis (CVP in education): Determine the minimum tuition level to cover training costs, thereby supporting decisions on tuition and scholarship policies.

To assess the effectiveness of cost analysis at universities, the following scales can be built: (1) Does the analysis cover training activities, scientific research, and community service? (2) The analysis data is based on a reliable accounting system, allocating reasonable costs between faculties, majors, and training programs; (3) Cost analysis results are provided in a timely manner to the Board of Directors when deciding to open new majors, adjust enrollment scale or allocate budget; (4) Analytical information helps identify cost trends: between faculties, majors or between school years; (5) Analytical information supports the determination of adding/removing training majors; (6) Analytical results help forecast training cost trends, thereby adjusting tuition strategies. (Hutaibat, K. et al., 2020; Shuhidan, S. M. et al., 2015).

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Thus, cost information analysis in universities not only provides pure financial data, but also becomes a strategic tool to improve management efficiency, ensuring a balance between training quality, competitiveness and financial sustainability of the school.

2.5. Preparing management accounting reports

MA reports are an important tool to help university leaders monitor the cost-resource situation and make timely decisions. Unlike financial reports that mainly serve external purposes, MA reports focus on providing detailed information by faculty, industry, training program or research project, thereby supporting management and evaluating operational efficiency.

To evaluate MA reporting at universities, the study proposes the following scales: (1) The report fully reflects the indicators of costs, revenue and performance results by department and program; (2) The report content is prepared according to management needs (by faculty, industry, research center, topic); (3) The report is prepared and provided on time, serving control and decision making; (4) The reporting system is capable of adjusting according to each management requirement or the specific characteristics of each unit; (5) Information is presented clearly, transparently, and easy to use for managers. (Hutaibat, K. et al., 2020; Gigli, S. et al., 2021; Marlina, E. et al., 2020). Completing the MA reporting system helps local universities improve their financial management capacity, control costs, and meet the requirements of autonomy and competitiveness in the context of higher education innovation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted to assess the level of application of management accounting at 26 local universities in Vietnam. The authors used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, quantitative data were collected through a survey using a structured questionnaire, with questions designed in the form of a 5-level Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

Survey subjects: 110 chief accountants, heads of financial planning departments and accounting staff at the universities, of which 86 valid questionnaires were collected.

Survey data were processed using SPSS 20 software to calculate the average value of observed variables. Based on the average value, the level of application of MA contents was assessed according to the following thresholds (Hair et al., 2010); Davis, 1993).

Average score from 1,0 to 1,8: Rated as Very Poor

Average score from 1,81 to 2,6: Rated as Poor

Average score from 2,61 to 3,4: Rated as Average

Average score from 3,41 to 4,2: Rated as Good

Average score from 4,21 to 5,0: Rated as Very Good.

In addition to the quantitative method, the study also conducted in-depth interviews with 6 chief accountants and heads of financial planning departments of local universities to clarify the current situation and factors affecting the application of MA in practice. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect in-depth information on the organization, operation and specific difficulties in implementing MA at universities.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Level of application of Management Accounting at local universities in Vietnam

The results of the survey of 86 valid questionnaires and in-depth interviews show that the level of application of MA at local universities in Vietnam is generally at an average level, with differences between specific contents. The average value of the observed variables ranges from 2,85 to 3,85, reflecting that the schools have initially applied some MA tools but are not synchronous and have not fully promoted the role of supporting management. In general, local universities mainly stop at using MA as a tool to support financial accounting, instead of a strategic management system. Some contents such as identifying and classifying costs, making estimates are applied quite well; meanwhile, the contents of analysis and making management reports to serve decision making are limited. Interview results also show that many schools lack specialized staff, have unsynchronized information systems, and have not applied modern management software, making MA information untimely and not linked to university autonomy requirements.

4.1.1. Level of cost identification and classification

In general, the level of cost identification and classification at local universities is assessed as good, but not uniform across contents. Weaknesses focus on distinguishing between fixed and variable costs and controllable and uncontrollable costs, showing the urgent need to improve the cost management accounting mechanism in a modern direction.

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Table 1. Survey results on the level of cost identification and classification at local universities.

Variables	Mean	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	N	Evaluation
(1) The university clearly distinguishes training, scientific research, and administrative management costs	3,85	2	5	2	5	18	40	21	86	Good
(2) Cost information is aggregated by function and reported periodically	3,60	2	5	3	7	20	35	21	86	Good
(3) The university clearly identifies fixed and variable costs in training	3,40	1	5	4	12	25	28	17	86	Average
(4) The university identifies controllable and uncontrollable costs in each department/office	3,20	1	5	6	14	27	25	14	86	Average
(5) The university assigns cost management responsibilities to affiliated units (cost centers)	3,55	2	5	3	8	21	32	22	86	Good

Source: Data analysis by authors

- Cost identification by function (training, research, management) achieved an average score of 3,85, which is considered good. Most universities have clearly defined the cost, helping to make financial management more transparent. However, there are still about 7 cases choosing level 2 or lower, reflecting the uneven cost identification. For example, Hong Duc University has established a system to separate training and research costs, thanks to which financial reports are transparent and easy to compare. On the contrary, Quang Nam University still combines many expenses, making information on research costs unclear.

- Periodic cost synthesis and reporting has an average score of 3,60, classified as good. This shows that schools have focused on building a management reporting system, but there are still cases where it is only implemented as a formality, not really linked to decision making. For example, Tra Vinh University has applied MA software to report detailed costs by faculty, while some other universities still mainly prepare reports according to the requirements of the governing body, rarely serving internal operations.

- Classification of fixed and variable costs is rated normal (Average = 3,40). This is a limited content, because many public universities still apply traditional accounting methods, lacking tools to support analysis of variable costs in training activities.

- The classification of controllable and uncontrollable costs has the lowest score (average = 3,20), still at a normal level. This reflects that the mechanism of cost accountability at faculties/departments is not clear, leading to difficulties in budget management.

- Attaching cost management responsibility to cost centers is rated well (average = 3,55). This is a positive signal showing that some schools have initially applied responsibility accounting, but it needs to be more widely replicated and standardized.

4.1.2. Level of cost standard setting and budgeting

The level of cost recognition and service pricing in local universities is generally considered good, especially in terms of completeness, accuracy and compliance with documents. However, more modern aspects such as timely recording and allocating indirect costs according to scientific criteria are still limited. This is the point that needs to be improved if universities want to improve the quality of information for management and move towards applying MA.

Table 2. Survey results on the level of standard setting and budgeting in local universities

Variables	Mean	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	N	Evaluation
(1) The university establishes training cost norms (teaching hours, learning materials, exam organization, etc.)	3,30	1	5	5	10	28	30	13	86	Average
(2) Scientific research cost norms are issued and applied uniformly	3,10	1	5	7	15	30	25	9	86	Average
(3) The university prepares annual budget for each unit (faculty, department, center)	3,50	2	5	3	8	26	34	15	86	Good
(4) The budget is built on the basis of forecasting the number of students, new programs, and resource needs	3,20	1	5	6	14	28	27	11	86	Average
(5) The budget is reviewed and adjusted periodically during the year to reflect actual changes	3,00	1	5	9	17	29	23	8	86	Average

Source: Data analysis by authors

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- The average training cost standard is 3,30, which is only average. Most universities have only set framework regulations (standard number of hours, lecturer remuneration standards, document printing costs, etc.), and have not yet set detailed cost standards for each training program.

- The scientific research cost standard is even more limited (average = 3,10). Many universities have reported that they still apply standards according to general regulations of the State and internal spending regulations, and have not yet built their own system suitable for the specific characteristics of the industry or field. For example, Hung Vuong University mainly relies on the guidance of the governing body when settling projects, lacking a flexible mechanism to control research costs.

- The annual budget estimate has an average score of 3,50, which is considered good. This shows that schools have focused on making estimates according to affiliated units, creating a basis for budget allocation. For example, Tra Vinh University has a separate budget plan for each faculty, contributing to improving transparency. However, many other schools still consider the budget as a procedure for budget approval, not really becoming a management tool.

- The budget associated with the forecast of student size and training program is only at a normal level (average = 3,20). Forecasting is still a formality, few schools use modern analytical tools to quantify costs per student.

- Periodic review and adjustment of the budget has the lowest score (average = 3,00). This is a major limitation, reflecting the situation of the budget being quite rigid, rarely updated according to the actual situation during the school year.

4.1.3. Level of cost recording and service costing

The level of cost recognition and service costing in local universities is generally assessed as good, especially in terms of complete, accurate and document-compliant recording. However, more modern aspects such as timely recording and allocating indirect costs according to scientific criteria are still limited. This is the point that needs to be improved if schools want to improve the quality of information for management and move towards applying MA.

Table 3. Survey results of the level of cost recognition and service costing in local universities

Variables	Mean	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	N	Evaluation
(1) Incurred costs are fully recorded both directly and indirectly	3,65	2	5	2	7	22	36	19	86	Good
(2) Recorded to the correct subject, in the correct accounting period, at the correct value and in accordance with legal documents	3,80	2	5	1	6	18	40	21	86	Good
(3) Expenses are recorded promptly when incurred to serve management reporting and budget adjustment	3,45	1	5	4	9	27	31	15	86	Good
(4) Expenses included in costing are guaranteed to be reasonable and valid according to accounting standards and spending regulations	3,50	2	5	3	8	25	34	16	86	Good
(5) Indirect costs are allocated according to scientific and reasonable criteria (number of students, teaching hours, area of use)	3,25	1	5	6	13	28	28	11	86	Average

Source: Data analysis by authors

- Recording of full costs (direct and indirect) achieved an average score of 3,65, which is considered good. Most schools have a process for collecting basic costs, including lecturer salaries, learning materials, exam organization, as well as indirect costs such as classroom depreciation and management costs. However, some small schools still record inconsistently, especially in indirect costs.

- Accuracy in recording (correct subject, correct period, correct value, with legal documents) achieved the highest average score (3,80 - good). This reflects the strict requirements of the public finance system, forcing schools to comply quite strictly. For example, Hong Duc University has built a standard process for recording costs by faculty, both for financial reporting and management reporting.

- Timeliness in recording costs has an average score of 3,45 (good), but not high. Some schools such as Hai Phong University and Quang Nam University said that the document process is still slow, causing the cost information to be updated in the management report not to be really timely for management.

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- The reasonableness and validity of the costs included in the cost calculation are also at a good level (average = 3,50). This is mainly because schools must comply with internal spending regulations and accounting standards, so the validity is guaranteed. However, determining the reasonableness in the specific training context is sometimes a formality.

- Indirect cost allocation is the weakest point (average = 3,25, normal). Most schools still allocate costs based on simple criteria (such as the total number of students), and have not applied more modern methods such as ABC (Activity-Based Costing). This leads to errors in calculating the cost of training services between faculties/centers.

4.1.4. Level of cost information analysis

The level of cost information analysis at local universities is generally only at a normal level, with the bright spots being the comprehensiveness of operations and the initial comparison of cost trends. However, unreasonable cost allocation, slow analysis and lack of forecasting are still major limitations. This shows the need to improve management accounting capacity and apply modern analysis tools to support strategic decisions on training, enrollment and finance.

Table 4. Survey results on the level of cost information analysis at local universities

Variables	Mean	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	N	Evaluation
(1) Does the analysis cover training activities, scientific research, and community service?	3,50	2	5	4	10	25	28	19	86	Good
(2) The analysis data is based on a reliable accounting system, allocating costs reasonably between faculties, majors, and training programs	3,30	1	5	6	14	27	25	14	86	Average
(3) The cost analysis results are provided promptly to the Board of Directors when deciding to open new majors, adjust enrollment scale, or allocate budget	3,20	1	5	7	15	29	23	12	86	Average
(4) The analysis information helps identify cost trends: between faculties, majors, or between school years	3,40	2	5	5	12	26	28	15	86	Average
(5) The analysis information supports the determination of adding/removing training majors	2,90	1	5	12	22	28	16	8	86	Average
(6) The analysis results help forecast training cost trends, thereby adjusting tuition strategies	2,85	1	5	13	21	29	15	8	86	Average

Source: Data analysis by authors

- The analysis of cost information covering training, scientific research and community service activities is rated quite well (Mean = 3,50). Universitys have initially paid attention to considering comprehensive costs, not just training. However, there are still about 14 cases rated at level 1-2, showing that many units have not linked cost analysis with community service activities.

- The reliability of analysis data and the way of allocating costs between faculties/majors is only at a normal level (Mean = 3,30). Many universities still apply manual allocation methods, lacking scientific basis (for example, mainly based on the number of students, without combining other criteria such as teaching hours or used area). This reduces the accuracy of the analysis results.

- Providing analytical information to the Board of Directors when making decisions (opening new majors, adjusting enrollment, allocating budget) is also only at a normal level (Mean = 3,20). In fact, at many local universities, cost analysis reports are often slow or only prepared when requested by management agencies, and have not become a regular tool to support internal decision making.

- Cost analysis information to identify trends over time or between faculties and majors has an average score of 3,40, at a normal level. This reflects that some universitys have compared data between years, but have not yet built a regular analysis system, leading to fragmented trend monitoring.

- Using analysis results to decide on adding or cutting training majors is still quite weak (Mean = 2,9). Most universitys still rely mainly on the Ministry's orientation or enrollment needs rather than on specific cost information.

- The weakest content is the ability to forecast training costs to adjust tuition strategies (Average = 2,85). This is a common limitation, because most local public universities still apply tuition fees according to general regulations, and rarely apply cost forecasting to build separate tuition policies suitable for each industry.

4.1.5. Level of management accounting reporting

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The level of MA reporting at local universities is generally assessed as normal. The advantage is that the information presented is increasingly transparent and easy to use. However, the major limitations are still that reporting is slow, inflexible and rarely customized to management needs. This reflects the need to upgrade the MA system and apply modern management software to serve strategic management.

Table 5. Survey results on the level of management accounting reporting

Variables	Mean	Min	Max	1	2	3	4	5	N	Evaluation
(1) The report fully reflects the indicators of costs, revenue and performance results for each department and program	3,45	2	5	5	11	24	29	17	86	Average
(2) The report content is prepared according to management needs (by department, industry, research center, topic)	3,30	1	5	7	14	28	25	12	86	Average
(3) The report is prepared and provided on time, serving control and decision making	3,25	1	5	9	13	29	23	12	86	Average
(4) The reporting system is capable of adjusting according to each management requirement or the specific characteristics of each unit	3,15	1	5	10	16	27	23	10	86	Average
(5) Information is presented clearly, transparently, and easy to use for managers	3,55	2	5	4	9	22	30	21	86	Good

Source: Data analysis by authors

- The MA report reflects the indicators of costs, revenues and operating results that are assessed at a normal level (Mean = 3,45). Some schools such as Tra Vinh University and Hong Duc University have prepared reports according to training programs (regular university, short-term training, international cooperation), thereby reflecting quite clearly the effectiveness of each type of activity. However, in many schools such as Quang Nam University, the report only stops at summarizing general revenue and expenditure, not detailed by program.

- The content of the report according to management needs (by faculty, industry, center, topic) has an average score of 3,30, a normal level. This shows that most schools still rely on pre-set financial reporting forms, which are not flexible. For example, Hong Duc University has initially tested reporting costs according to each research topic, while many other schools have not been able to do so.

- In terms of timeliness, the new MA report reaches an average score of 3,25. Many units reported that reports are often delayed compared to the time when decisions need to be made (for example, adjusting enrollment targets). Reports are sometimes only prepared quarterly/yearly, lacking updates.

- The ability to customize reports according to management requirements (for example, when the Board of Directors wants to see training costs for each specific industry) is also low (Mean = 3,15). This is because the accounting system in most local schools has not yet integrated management analysis software, and is mainly manual, making it difficult to quickly change the report structure.

- A bright point is the level of clear and transparent information presentation, reaching an average of 3,55, which is considered good. Schools have focused on designing easy-to-read reports and dividing indicators reasonably. For example, Hong Duc University presents MA reports in the form of charts and comparison tables for many years, helping the Board of Directors easily grasp the situation of costs and revenues.

4.2. Solutions to improve the level of application of Management Accounting at local universities in Vietnam

The survey results show that although local universities have made progress in applying cost MA, the implementation level is generally limited and inconsistent. Some aspects have reached a fairly good level, such as identifying costs by function or initially preparing MA reports for management. However, many other important contents are only at a normal level, even weak, such as: classifying fixed and variable costs; determining controllable and uncontrollable costs; analyzing costs for management decisions; or building scientific, predictive estimates. The main reason comes from the fact that the accounting system at universities still focuses on compliance with public finance regulations, lacks modern MA analysis tools, and accounting staff have limited professional capacity and management skills. In addition, many universities do not have a mechanism to attach cost management responsibilities to affiliated units, making it difficult for accounting information to play a supporting role in strategic decision making.

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To overcome the above limitations and gradually improve the level of application of cost MA, it is necessary to implement the following solutions:

(1) Perfecting the mechanism for identifying and classifying costs: Building a system to classify costs by function (training, research, management), and at the same time adding modern classification criteria (fixed - variable costs; controllable - uncontrollable); Issuing a unified process for faculties and departments to apply, avoiding the situation where each unit implements differently, leading to information lacking comparability.

(2) Building and applying scientific norms and estimates: Developing training cost norms based on criteria of number of students, teaching hours, training types, instead of relying too much on experience or rigid spending frameworks; Strengthen the application of information technology in budgeting, with the ability to simulate different scenarios (e.g., changing enrollment scale, opening new majors); Forming a mechanism to link budgeting with the financial management responsibilities of each affiliated unit.

(3) Improving the quality of cost recording and calculating the cost of training services: Completing the system of documents and accounting software to ensure timely, accurate and transparent recording; Supplementing the method of allocating scientific indirect costs (by teaching hours, number of students, area of use), instead of just allocating according to a simple ratio; Gradually standardizing the determination of training service costs, ensuring reasonableness and compliance with accounting standards.

(4) Promoting analysis of cost information for management: Building a periodic cost analysis process for three main areas: training, scientific research and community service; Provide timely cost analysis reports to the Board of Directors when making strategic decisions (opening majors, adjusting tuition fees, allocating budgets); Develop the capacity to forecast cost trends as a basis for financial planning and adjusting tuition fees appropriately.

(5) Complete the cost MA reporting system: Design flexible report templates that can be adjusted according to the requirements of each management level (faculty, major, research center); Add indicators for analyzing costs, revenue and performance results for each training program, instead of just summarizing the whole school; Ensure reports are prepared on time, easy to use, transparent and directly serve the control and decision-making.

(6) Improve the capacity of MA staff: Organize training courses, in-depth training on MA for accounting staff, financial management staff; Encourage accounting staff to approach modern MA methods (ABC - Activity Based Costing, Budgeting, Responsibility Accounting); Linking cost MA to the school development strategy, considering it a management tool rather than just a formality.

(7) Increasing the application of information technology: Investing in accounting software with integrated management functions, helping to analyze costs quickly and intuitively; Applying big data to monitor training costs in real time, thereby improving forecasting and planning capabilities.

To improve the level of application of cost MA, local universities in Vietnam need a synchronous strategy, focusing on perfecting the mechanism of identifying - recording - analyzing costs, while focusing on training human resources and applying modern technology. These solutions not only contribute to improving the effectiveness of financial management but also help universities be more proactive in university autonomy, ensuring sustainable development.

5. CONCLUSION

The research results show that the application of MA at local universities in Vietnam is still at an average level, mainly focusing on basic recording and reporting, while cost analysis, trend forecasting and strategic decision support are still limited. The main reasons come from the unsynchronized information system, simple analysis methods and the lack of attention to management accounting human resources. Therefore, to improve efficiency, schools need to invest in technology infrastructure, standardize data, diversify analysis tools and strengthen human resource training, in order to maximize the role of cost management accounting in modern university management.

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