

A bibliographic analysis of university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia 1996 to 2023

International
Journal of
Comparative
Education and
Development

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Received 17 October 2023

Revised 9 April 2024

7 July 2024

21 October 2024

Accepted 14 January 2025

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the trend of research on universities and accountability (UAA) in Southeast Asian (SEA) countries.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 115 journal articles, conference papers, books and book chapters were obtained from the Scopus database spanning the years 1996–2023. These documents were subsequently analyzed using bibliometric methods.

Findings – The majority of UAA in SEA documents were published between 2007 and 2023 (106 documents, 92.19%). Scholars from both SEA countries and outside the region, particularly Australia, co-authored UAA in SEA documents. While scholars from Vietnam contributed the highest number of UAA in SEA publications (30 documents), scholars from Australia received the highest number of citations (878 citations). Collaboration between Vietnam and Australia emerged as the most productive partnership in conducting studies on UAA in SEA. Additionally, UAA in SEA documents were published not only in education-related outlets but also in other sectors, particularly in public policy. Furthermore, studies on UAA in different countries exhibited both similar and dissimilar interest keywords.

Originality/value – This study represents the first bibliometric analysis focusing on UAA in SEA literature. The insights and implications derived from this study are valuable for future researchers, university leaders and policymakers.

Keywords Higher education, Autonomy, Accountability, Governance, Southeast Asia, Science mapping

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Southeast Asia (SEA) has long been recognized as one of the world's most active and promising economic areas, with a population of approximately 700 million people and a combined gross domestic product of nearly US\$ 3,000bn (World Bank, 2020). SEA policymakers recognize the

Funding: The authors declare that no funds, grants, or other support were received during the preparation of this manuscript.

Competing interests: The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

Author contributions: All authors have equal contribution. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.



significance of higher education (HE) as a crucial driver of the region's economic development (Do *et al.*, 2021; Walmsley *et al.*, 2017). Nonetheless, with the exception of Singapore, SEA HE systems appear to be falling behind the expectations of the economic sector (Chen, 2018; Do *et al.*, 2021; Kassim *et al.*, 2019). Several HE changes have been implemented in SEA countries in recent years. The trend towards greater autonomy for institutions, as well as increased accountability requirements, is central to these reforms. SEA HE policymakers anticipate that increased autonomy and accountability will aid in the transformation of the regional HE system into one that is less bureaucratic, more efficient, performs better and is less dependent on state funding (Ratanawijitrasin, 2015; The HEAD Foundation, 2017; UNESCO, 2006).

At the regional level, SEA, as a supranational organization, has also implemented several initiatives to promote the development of the HE of member countries in general and emphasize enhancing university autonomy and accountability (UAA) in particular. Since 1959, an organization, namely the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Institute for Higher Education Development (RIHED), was established with the mission of boosting exchange of knowledge and policy dialog among HE practitioners (e.g. policymakers, university leaders/managers and researchers) (SEAMEO RIHED, 2019). Over the previous decades, it's apparent that enhanced UAA has been regarded as one of the key priorities under SEAMEO RIHED's agenda (see Ratanawijitrasin, 2015; Yavaprabhas, 2014).

In the same line as policymakers, HE scholars both inside and beyond the area have devoted more attention to the issue of UAA (Berg *et al.*, 2019; Jaremsiripornkul and Pandey, 2018; Ratanawijitrasin, 2015; Tran, 2014). Several studies on the aforementioned topic have been published, either with or without financial backing from SEA member countries. Nonetheless, we do not yet know how prior studies on UAA in SEA were conducted. As a result, the purpose of this study is to fill a research gap. In particular, we seek to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. What is the growth pattern of Scopus documents on UAA in SEA?
- RQ2. How do authors from different countries collaborate to publish documents on UAA in SEA?
- RQ3. Who and what are the most prominent authors, publications and outlets (journals/ book series) in the topic of UAA in SEA?
- RQ4. What are the primary themes in the extant literature on UAA in SEA?

The main contributions of this study are twofold. First, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first-ever bibliometric work on UAA, focusing specifically on the SEA region. This study follows the steps of some previous works, which also select the SEA regions as objects for bibliometric analyses in educational research such as Do *et al.* (2021)'s work on lifelong learning or Ngoc and Barrot (2023)'s work on English language teaching. Selecting a specific region for bibliometric analysis instead of the global scale is also observed in numerous recent bibliometric studies in educational sciences (see Hallinger, 2019; Hallinger, 2020; Hallinger and Hammad, 2019). This approach helps readers gain deeper insights into the existing literature on a given topic within a specific region.

Second, as university autonomy and university accountability are often regarded as "two sides of the same coin" (Enders *et al.*, 2013), investigating both "sides" simultaneously may offer more insight than considering autonomy or accountability individually. In the past, several authors have attempted to examine the issues of UAA in the same studies (Berdahl, 1990; Kallio *et al.*, 2022; Raza, 2009). However, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first bibliometric work to focus on UAA simultaneously.

The paper is organized as follows. The next part analyzes the related literature on UAA and HE in SEA. The research method and the data source that we employed for our study are both described in the third part. The fourth part then contains the results and discussion. The paper ends with conclusions and implications.

Literature review

University's autonomy and accountability

There are numerous ways to approach the notions of UAA in the literature that is currently available. [Dill \(2001\)](#) argues that while autonomy traditionally refers to the academic freedom of the academic community, it now relates to the degree of discretion the university has over its internal governance. Parallel to this, other authors take into account autonomy as a result of the ongoing deregulation of HE, in which public universities are viewed less as state agencies and more as public corporations. The university autonomy is broken down into four dimensions (i.e. organizational, financial, staffing and academic) by the European University Association (EUA) in a series of reports on university autonomy published since 2009 (see [Estermann and Nokkala, 2009](#); [Estermann et al., 2011](#); [Pruvot and Estermann, 2017](#)). This decomposition is then further expanded so that each dimension of university autonomy is broken down into a number of indicators. According to the most recent EUA study ([Pruvot and Estermann, 2017](#)), organizational autonomy is made up of 7 indicators, while the numbers corresponding to the other 3 dimensions are 11 (financial autonomy), 8 (staffing autonomy) and 12 (academic autonomy), respectively. The EUA attempts to quantify the corresponding level of autonomy, ranging from 0% to 100%, for each indicator. All in all, the EUA has succeeded in introducing a so-called “scorecard of university autonomy in Europe,” gathering data from 29 HE countries and states. This EUA’s conceptualization of autonomy, indeed, was followed by a number of non-European scholars, including Ethiopia ([Gebru et al., 2020](#)), Moldova ([Turcan and Bugaian, 2014](#)) or Vietnam ([Tuan et al., 2021](#)).

University accountability is an indispensable concept of autonomy. Nevertheless, as opposed to autonomy, the conceptualization of university accountability appears to be more “buzz” ([Sulkowski, 2016](#)). Some authors regard university accountability from the lens of public sector accountability ([Vidovich and Slee, 2001](#)). From this perspective, we may divide university accountability into four types ([Corbett and Corbett, 1996](#)): (1) upward accountability, (2) outward accountability, (3) downward accountability and (4) inward accountability. Specifically, upward accountability refers to the legal and institutional obligations and duties of the university. This type of accountability is, indeed, the most traditional view of accountability. Outward accountability is a newer approach that is related to accountability towards direct clients (i.e. students and parents in the context of HE), employers and the public community. The downward dimension emphasizes the accountability of university leaders/managers with their faculty members as well as administrative staff. Last but not least, inward accountability involves the ethics, conscientious and moral aspects of individuals within HE. Some other authors such as [Salmi \(2009\)](#) or [Sulkowski \(2016\)](#) focus on the outcomes and efficiency while discussing university accountability. Specifically, as recipients of public subsidies and private donations, universities are compelled to justify the transparency and efficiency of their financial management to stakeholders such as governments, philanthropists and the public community. Meanwhile, from a policymaking perspective, the Malaysia [Ministry of Higher Education \(2007\)](#) defines accountability as “the responsibility to demonstrate that specific and carefully defined outcomes result from HE and that these outcomes are worth what they cost” ([Jim et al., 2008](#), p. 3).

Higher education in Southeast Asia

SEA is composed of 11 countries with different political orientations, levels of development and social and cultural backgrounds. Under this circumstance, the HE systems of 11 respective countries are also various. Regarding quantity, some countries tend to reach the threshold of universal HE such as Singapore or Thailand with gross enrollment ratios (GERs) being 85% in 2019 and 49% in 2016. Meanwhile, the majority, including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Vietnam and Timor Leste, are in a state of massive HE with GERs ranging from 15% to 45%. Laos is the only country in which the HE system is at an elite stage with a GER of only 13% in 2017 (see [Table 1](#)). Regarding quality, some countries contribute a significant number of universities in the Top 500 QS Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand). Meanwhile, some others do not even have representatives in the top

Table 1. Some statistics on higher education in Southeast Asia in recent years

No	Country	Number of higher education institution (2017)	Number of higher education student (thousands) (2019)	% of private higher education institutions (2017)	% private higher education student enrollment (2017)	Gross enrollment ratio	Number of higher education institutions in top 500 QS Asia (2022)
1	Brunei	12	11	50	11% (2018)	32% (2020)	2
2	Cambodia	126	207	57	40% (2020)	13% (2017)	NA
3	Indonesia	2,512	>7,000	97	58% (2021)	36% (2018)	34
4	Lao PDR	168	82	49	NA	13% (2020)	NA
5	Malaysia	619	860	58	31% (2019)	45% (2018)	36
6	Myanmar	204	870	17	NA	19% (2018)	NA
7	The Philippines	1943	3,589	88	56% (2020)	36% (2021)	15
8	Singapore	39	178	77	64% (2020)	85% (2019)	3
9	Thailand	521	2,003	87	18% (2020)	49% (2016)	23
10	Vietnam	237	1,672	27	19% (2019)	29% (2019)	11
11	Timor Leste	NA	NA	NA	NA	18% (2010)	NA

Note(s): NA = not available; PDR = Lao People's Democratic

Source(s): Authors synthesized from Alan (2021), Anthony (2021), ASEAM Education (2024), Asia University Rankings (2022), Atherton *et al.* (2018), International Trade Administration (2022), Open Development (2022), SHARE (2019), Statista (2024) and Tapsir (2019); Authors' own work

1,000 (Cambodia, Myanmar and Timor Leste) (Asia University Rankings, 2022). Regarding private HE, in some countries, the roles of private universities are considerable with high ratios of private universities as well as high ratios of students at private universities such as Indonesia (97% of private HE institutions and 58% private HE students), the Philippines (88% and 56%) or Singapore (77% and 64%), while in some others, such as Vietnam or Myanmar, the roles of private HE are minimal (17%). A brief profile of HE in SEA is represented in Table 1.

Over the recent decades, governments in SEA have endeavored to foster the development of their socio-economies through HE (Khan and Anwar, 2021; Rizvi, 2017). In light of this, SEA governments have identified enhanced UAA as a pivotal measure to reform their HE systems. However, despite the efforts of many SEA countries to enhance UAA, the actual practices vary significantly. For instance, under the new context of enhanced autonomy, Singapore abolishes the status of civil servants to their faculty members, but this is not the case in Malaysia (The HEAD Foundation, 2017) and Vietnam (Parajuli *et al.*, 2020). In the same vein, as universities are expected to have higher accountability, performance-based funding mechanisms are introduced in Thailand (Sangiumvibool and Chonglertham, 2017) but not in Vietnam (Le *et al.*, 2021). Table 2 summarizes some recent HE reforms in SEA countries involving enhanced autonomy and accountability granted for their HE institutions.

Method

We selected Scopus for our empirical analysis. Overall, Scopus provides diverse scientific publications with more than billions of scientific articles, books, book chapters, conference

Table 2. Recent higher education reforms in Southeast Asia countries involving autonomy and accountability

Year	Country	Name of plan	Key content regarding university autonomy and accountability	Source
2005	Vietnam	Higher Education Reform Agenda	Granting higher autonomy for universities is identified as one of the eight measures to reform higher education	The Government (2005)
2014		Resolution No. 77/NQ-CP on pilot renovation of the operation mechanism of public tertiary education institutions during 2014–2017	Piloting autonomy mechanism in 23 universities	The Government (2014)
2007	Malaysia	National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2007–2020	Expanding the public universities autonomy based on the readiness of the higher education system	Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), (2007)
2015		Malaysia Education Blueprint (Higher Education) 2015–2025		Da Wan <i>et al.</i> (2018) and Ministry of Education (MOE) (2015)
1998	Cambodia	Royal Decree on the Legal Status of Public Administrative Institutions	Granting autonomy and accountability for public higher education institutions as key change to increase higher education quality	Touch <i>et al.</i> (2014)
2003	Indonesia	Higher Education Long-Term Strategy 2003–2010	Granting autonomy to public institutions to improve the quality of higher education system and the effectiveness of government management	Nizam and Nurdin (2014)
1990	Thailand	Higher Education Long Range Plan (1990–2004)	Introducing autonomy concept into practice in public higher education institutions	Jarernsripornkul and Pandey (2018)
2008		2nd Higher Education Long Range Plan (2008–2022)	Allowing autonomous universities to develop their own strategic plans	

Source(s): Authors' own work

papers and other publishing types ([Elsevier, 2017](#)). Furthermore, according to [Pham *et al.* \(2021\)](#), Scopus provides a more comprehensive picture of education research than Clarivate Web of Science (WOS). Given these arguments, Scopus is an appropriate database source for this research.

This study follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidance for data collection. Initially, PRISMA is commonly used for medical science analysis ([Busch, 2019](#); [Levay and Craven, 2019](#)). Over the last few years, PRISMA has been increasingly applied in other fields, including education research ([Hallinger and Nguyen, 2020](#); [Pham *et al.*, 2021](#)). In the identification phase, the search query on the Scopus website was used the first time on May 19, 2022, and the second time on March 7, 2024, to update data from 2022 to 2023, according to the reviewer's suggestion in review round 1. The first data of 20,334 publications were obtained by searching keywords (accountability, autonomy, university, college and HE) related results by title, summary and keywords as follows:

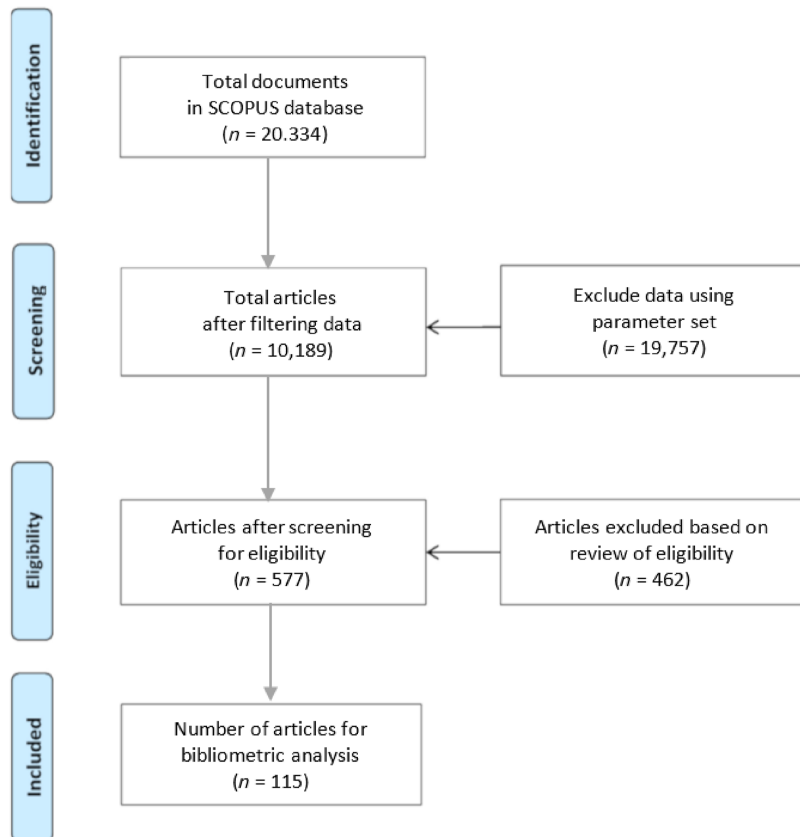
TITLE-ABS-KEY(accountability OR autonomy) AND (universit* OR college* OR "higher education")

In the screening phase, the document types were limited to articles, books, book chapters and conference papers. Subject areas are limited to social science. We exclude the publications published in 2024 to ensure sufficient data by publication years (Gao *et al.*, 2021). The publication language is limited to English. After the document filtering, 10,189 relevant scientific publications were exported. The geographic distribution was limited to 11 SEA countries, i.e. Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, Timor Leste and Brunei, covering SEA and Indochina. After this step, we obtained a dataset of 577 articles. In the eligibility phase, to ensure the publication topics were relevant to UAA in SEA, we reviewed all articles, including their titles, abstracts and content in necessary cases. Finally, our dataset comprises 115 publications for final data analysis (Figure 1).

Results and discussion

The growth trend

The Scopus dataset we used for the subsequent study included 115 UAA in SEA papers. The first publication on UAA in SEA is entitled *Academic freedom and university autonomy in Thailand*, authored by Suwanwela (1996) from Chulalongkorn University (Thailand). This is slightly later than studies on UAA conducted in other regions such as East Asia (e.g. Law,



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 1. The collection of research on university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia by PRISMA from Scopus

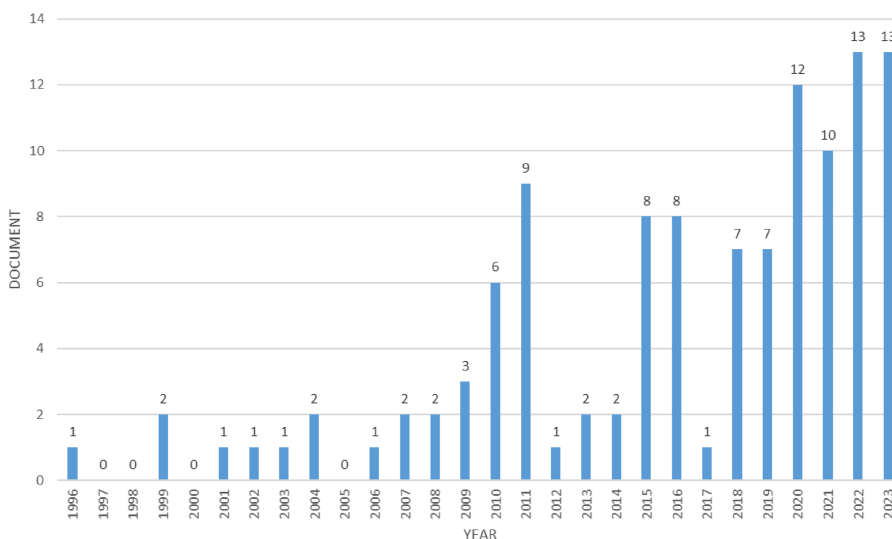
1995) or Africa (e.g. Moodie, 1994). This delayed inception is rational, as it corresponds with the delayed implementation of UAA policies in SEA countries in general. As illustrated in Table 2, the 1990s marked the period during which initial policies or agendas regarding UAA were introduced in SEA countries (see Jarernsiripornkul and Pandey, 2018).

From 1996 to 2006, only nine articles about UAA in SEA were published, which equals 8.69% of the total number of articles about UAA in SEA. This shows that scholars did not pay much attention to the topic during this period. In the period of time from 2007 to 2023, the number of publications on UAA in SEA has increased, with 106 publications published (or 92.19% of the total publications). However, it was reported that the annual publications in this period were still unstable. The year 2020 marked the first time the number of publications on this topic reached double digits (12 publications). Since then until the latest year (2023), the number of UAAs in SEA publications appears to be stably high (always over 10 papers per year) (Figure 2). This upsurge in research output reflects the growing attention of SEA countries' governments and universities towards UAA in recent years.

Geographical distribution and cross-country collaboration

According to the total number of papers and citations, Table 3 outlines the countries that have contributed the most to UAA in SEA. Regarding the number of publications, it is clear that both SEA countries and non-SEA countries have contributed to the topic of UAA in SEA. The four countries that have produced the most work on this subject are Vietnam (30 documents), Malaysia (24), Australia (21) and Indonesia (14). The combined efforts of these four nations resulted in producing 82 publications, which accounted for 71.30% of the total number of 115 papers. Apart from Australia (rank no. 3), documents on UAA in SEA were also published by scholars from various nations outside of SEA, including China (rank no. 6), Taiwan Republic of China (ROC) (rank no. 8), the USA (rank no. 9) and the UK (rank no. 10) (see Table 3).

Regarding the number of citations, Australia is the most influential nation, receiving 878 citations, followed by Vietnam (256 citations), Malaysia (228 citations), South Korea (159 citations) and Indonesia (115 citations). These top 5 nations receive 964 citations, approximately 62.07% of the total number of citations.



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2. Number of publications on university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia from 1996 to 2023

Table 3. Top countries according to number of documents and citations

Number of documents			Number of citations		
Rank	Country	Documents	Rank	Country	Citations
1	Vietnam	30	1	Australia*	878
2	Malaysia	24	2	Vietnam	256
3	Australia*	21	3	Malaysia	228
4	Indonesia	14	4	South Korea*	159
5	Thailand	9	5	Indonesia	115
6	China*	5	6	Thailand	76
7	Singapore	4	7	The United Kingdom*	70
8	Taiwan ROC*	4	8	Japan*	58
9	The United States*	4	9	Singapore	53
10	The United Kingdom*	3	10	China*	50

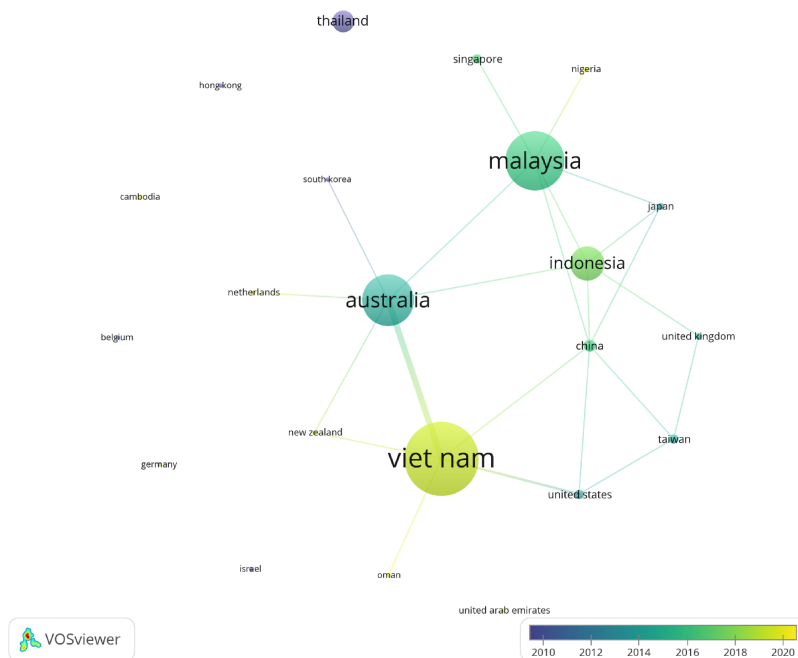
Note(s): Countries with * are non member countries of SEA region; ROC = Republic of China
Source(s): Authors' own work

The appearance of the non-SEA countries in these two leagues may be interpreted as follows. First, due to the low level of research capabilities, numerous SEA authors must collaborate with foreign colleagues from developed countries to conduct research and co-publish publications. This phenomenon is also observed in this study, especially with authors from Vietnam (see [Hayden and Thiep, 2007](#); [Pham and Goyette, 2019](#)). Second, many authors of UAA in SEA studies affiliated with countries outside of SEA are, indeed, originally from SEA countries. For instance, the work of [Bui et al. \(2017\)](#) was co-authored by Bui Binh, Hien Hoang, Duc P.T. and P.W. Senarath Yapa. Among these co-authors, Bui Binh and Duc P.T. are Vietnamese people but affiliated with Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand) and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University (Australia), respectively. Third, it appears that non-SEA countries' scholars are also interested in UAA in SEA literature. Among others, veteran scholar Simon Marginson from the University of Melbourne (Australia) is the highest-profile figure with two papers and a total citation of 370 ([Marginson, 2011a, b](#)). In his works, Marginson introduced a so-called “*the Confucian model*” to indicate the HE system in East and SEA.

Apart from Simon Marginson, other high-profile non-SEA figures include Grant Harman (University of New England, Australia) and Jung Cheol Shin (Seoul National University, South Korea) ([Shin and Harman, 2009](#); 159 citations), Martin Hayden (Southern Cross University, Australia) ([Hayden and Thiep, 2007](#); [Van Khanh and Hayden, 2010](#); 100 citations) and Morshidi Bin Sirat (Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia) ([Sirat, 2010](#); 83 citations).

Apart from the above results, it's worth mentioning the cases of other SEA countries not appearing in these two leagues, including Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines and Timor Leste. As accounted for from our empirical data, among these six countries, only Cambodia has one UAA publication during the studied period (see [Chhaing, 2022](#)).

[Figure 3](#) presents the collaboration network among different countries on UAA in SEA. The node size presents each country's total number of publications on the UAA in SEA, and the node's color presents the experience of the respective country on this research topic. [Figure 2](#) shows that Thai scholars are the most experienced in studies of UAA in SEA (color purple). Meanwhile, Vietnam is the most prolific emerging country in this research topic (color yellow). Regarding the collaboration pattern, the Vietnam–Australia collaboration is the most important link, represented by the bold line connecting the two respective nodes. Totally, the two countries have co-published together 10 UAA in SEA documents, with the first one found in 2007 ([Hayden and Thiep, 2007](#)) and the most recent one found in 2019 ([Da Wan et al., 2019](#)). The bold collaboration between Vietnam and Australia in UAA in SEA studies, indeed, reflects a wider collaboration between the two academic systems ([Pham et al., 2023](#)). Because it is consistent with two recent works by [Ho et al. \(2020\)](#) and [Nguyen et al. \(2017\)](#) who also reveal that among international partners in academic publishing in all subjects, Australia is the most important partner of Vietnam.



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 3. Co-author collaboration network analysis by country in university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia literature

Top sources

UAA in SEA documents has been found in different types of publishing sources, including 86 journal articles (or 74.82%), 13 book chapters (or 11.30%), 6 books (5.21%) and 4 conference papers (3.47%). [Table 4](#) represents the most active sources regarding the number of publications and citations. Regarding the number of publications, *HE* (journal) is the leading source with six publications, followed by two book series, *HE in Asia* and *HE Dynamics*, with each having four publications. Overall, the top 10 sources contribute 31 UAA in SEA documents or 26.95% of the total 115 documents of the dataset.

A closer look into the top 10 active sources in UAA in SEA unveils that none of the sources are specifically in SEA education (e.g. *Journal of Institutional Research South East Asia*). In comparison, two sources have specificity in Asia Education (*Asia Pacific Education Review* and *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*) and one book series (*HE in Asia*); three sources have a specialty in HE, including two journals (*HE* and *Quality In HE*) and one book series (*HE Dynamic*) and one journal having a specialty in public policy (*Journal of Asian Public Policy*). This interesting finding, indeed, reflects the nature of UAA as an interdisciplinary topic. This assertion is also supported by [Albornoz \(1991\)](#) or [King \(2015\)](#), who argued that UAA might be regarded from different perspectives other than education such as public policy or sociology.

In terms of citations, sources related to *HE* seem to have the most number of citations (649 citations), followed by sources related to *education in general* (369 citations), *development, public policy and management* (35 citations). These sources have 1,138 citations or contribute to 74.67% of the total 1,524 citations in UAA in SEA. Moreover, only five sources with the highest number of publications appear as top influence sources in UAA IN SEA: *HE*, *HE Dynamics*, *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *HE Research and Development* and *Journal of*

Table 4. Top 10 sources publishing in university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia ranked by number of publications and citations

Number of documents				Number of citations			
Rank	Source (type of source)	Scope*	Document	Rank	Source (type of source)	Scope*	Citation
1	<i>Higher Education (Journal)</i>	Higher education	6	1	<i>Higher Education (Journal)</i>	Higher education	549
2	<i>Higher Education Dynamics (Book)</i>	Higher education	4	2	<i>Asia Pacific Education Review (Journal)</i>	Education in general	203
3	<i>Higher Education in Asia (Book)</i>	Higher education	4	3	<i>Higher Education Research and Development (Journal)</i>	Higher education	85
4	<i>Asia Pacific Education Review (Journal)</i>	Education in general	3	4	<i>Higher Education Dynamics (Book)</i>	Higher education	60
5	<i>Journal of Asian Public Policy (Journal)</i>	Development, public policy And governance	3	5	<i>Educational Research for Policy and Practice (Journal)</i>	Education in general	49
6	<i>Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice (Journal)</i>	Higher education	3	6	<i>International Journal of Educational Management (Journal)</i>	Education in general	46
7	<i>Higher Education Research and Development (Journal)</i>	Higher education	2	7	<i>International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning (Journal)</i>	Education in general	41
8	<i>Quality in Higher Education (Journal)</i>	Higher education	2	8	<i>Quality in Higher Education (Journal)</i>	Higher education	40
9	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Education (Journal)</i>	Education in general	2	9	<i>Journal of Asian Public Policy (Journal)</i>	Development, public policy and governance	35
10	<i>Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education (Journal)</i>	Higher education	2	10	<i>Medical Teacher (Journal)</i>	Education in general	30

Note(s): Scope is assigned by the co-authors

Source(s): Authors' own work

Asian Public Policy. *HE* is the source with the highest number of publications and citations, and *HE Dynamics* is the most impactful book in UAA in SEA topics.

Top author's affiliation

Table 5 presents the top 10 active affiliations in UAA in SEA studies. In terms of publication numbers, these top 10 affiliations contribute 38 documents, accounting for 33.04% of the total 115 UAA in SEA publications. Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia) and Vietnam National University-Hanoi (Vietnam) emerge as the leading affiliations in this field, each with six publications, followed by the University of Melbourne (Australia), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (Malaysia) and National Economics University (Vietnam), all with four publications. Interestingly, among the top 10 institutions, it was noted that three are from outside SEA, all originating from Australia (see Table 5).

In terms of citations, the University of Melbourne (Australia) leads with the highest number of citations, totaling 397 citations, followed by Seoul National University (South Korea) and the University of New England (Australia), each with 159 citations, and Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia) with 119 citations. Collectively, these top 10 affiliations garnered 1,265 citations, representing 83.01% of the total citations. Notably, Australian universities dominate this category, contributing five of the top 10 affiliations. Alongside the University of Melbourne and the University of New England, other Australian institutions include Southern Cross University (100 citations), James Cook University (59 citations) and Swinburne University of Technology (57 citations). Together, these five affiliations received 615 citations, accounting for 40.35% of the total 1,524 citations in UAA in SEA.

Among the top 10 affiliations in terms of citations, the case of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Thailand (rank no. 10) stands out as exceptional, as it is a policy-supported organization rather than an academic institution like the others. Over the period from 1996 to 2023, staff from UNESCO Thailand contributed

Table 5. Top 10 affiliations publishing in university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia ranked by number of documents and citations

Number of documents			Number of citations		
Rank	Affiliation	Documents	Rank	Affiliation	Citations
1	Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia	6	1	University of Melbourne, Australia*	397
1	Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam	6	2	Seoul National University, South Korea*	159
3	University of Melbourne, Australia*	4	2	University of New England, Australia*	159
3	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Malaysia	4	4	Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia	119
3	National Economics University, Hanoi, Vietnam	4	5	Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam	106
6	Monash University, Australia*	3	6	Southern Cross University, Lismore, Australia*	100
7	Australian National University, Australia*	3	7	James Cook University, Australia*	59
8	Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam	3	8	International Christian University, Japan*	58
9	Universiti Putra Malaysia, Malaysia	3	9	Swinburne University of Technology, Australia*	57
10	Vinh University, Vietnam	3	10	UNESCO, Thailand	51

Note(s): Institutions with * are not member countries of SEA region

Source(s): Authors' own work

to the publications of two UAA in SEA documents (Lee, 2004; Teter and Wang, 2021). This discovery, however, underscores the nature of UAA as a policy issue at the governmental level.

Top authors and research groups

Our result reveals that 245 authors have co-authored at least one UAA in SEA documents between 1996 and 2023. Table 6 presents the top 10 authors in UAA in SEA according to the

Table 6. The 10 most highly cited authors on university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia ranked by publications and citation from 1996 to 2023

Number of documents				Number of citations			
Rank	Author	Affiliation	Documents	Rank	Author	Affiliation	Citations
1	Do, Ha Thi Hai	National Economics University, Hanoi, Vietnam	4	1	Marginson, Simon*	University of Melbourne, Australia	370
1	Mai, Anh Ngoc	National Economics University, Hanoi, Vietnam	4	2	Harman, Grant*	University Of New England, Australia	159
1	Hai, Pham Thi Thanh	National University, Hanoi, Vietnam	4	2	Shin, Jung Cheol*	Seoul National University, South Korea	159
4	Pham, Huong Thi	National University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam	3	4	Hayden, Martin*	Southern Cross University, Australia	100
5–10	Marginson, Simon*	University Of Melbourne, Australia	2	5	Sirat, Morshidi Bin	Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia	83
5–10	Hayden, Martin*	Southern Cross University, Australia	2	6	Thiep, Lam Quang	Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Viet Nam	72
5–10	Lee, Molly N. N	UNESCO, Thailand	2	7–10	Judd, Jenni*	James Cook University, Australia	59
5–10	Nguyen, Thi Lan Huong	University of Melbourne, Australia; Hanoi University of Industry, Viet Nam	2	7–10	Preston, Robyn*	James Cook University, Australia	59
5–10	Jung, Insung*	International Christian University, Japan	2	7–10	Larkins, Sarah*	James Cook University, Australia	59
5–10	Judd, Jenni*	James Cook University, Australia	2	7–10	Taylor, Judy*	James Cook University, Australia	59

Note(s): Authors with * are not affiliated with institutions outside of SEA region

Source(s): Authors' own work

members) and the one led by Ismail Ismi Arif (labeled Ismail IA, Malaysia, 7 members). The above findings are understandable as education studies in general and UAA studies in particular in SEA are only premature (Ratanawijitrasin, 2015). Thus, the result of weak and fragmented research groups of UAA in SEA is not surprising.

The most cited documents and favorite topics

Table 7 presents the top 10 UAA in SEA documents with the highest number of citations in this field from 1996 to 2023. As indicated, most of these publications have been published since 2009, with only one published in 2004. Evidently, these publications mainly come from the most cited authors in the UAA in SEA (i.e. Marginson Simon, Harman Grant, Shin Jung Cheol, Hayden Martin and Sirat Morshidi Bin).

To delve deeper into the topics identified by existing literature on UAA in SEA, we conducted a co-keyword analysis. In this instance, we not only utilized author keywords provided by the Scopus database, as many other bibliometric studies have done (e.g. Narong and Hallinger, 2024; Ha *et al.*, 2020), but also employed keywords manually generated by our team of co-authors. Specifically, we noted that certain UAA in SEA documents included the names of the respective SEA countries in their author keywords, while others did not. For the latter group, we manually added new keywords corresponding to the names of the respective SEA countries. For example, in the work of Phusavat and Chansa-ngavej (2007), entitled “*The role of university classification on developing standards in education*,” two keywords were extracted from the Scopus database: “standards” and “university classification.” We then added “Thailand” as a third keyword because Phusavat and Chansa-ngavej (2007) selected Thailand as the location or setting for their study. Ultimately, 115 UAA in SEA documents were supplemented with keywords corresponding to their respective setting countries. Based on the new set of keywords (including those provided by Scopus and those added manually), two-mode keyword analysis was performed on 155 UAA in SEA documents, as depicted in Figure 5, while Tables 8 and 9 display keywords pertaining to each SEA country or shared by several SEA countries.

Regarding the locations/settings of UAA in SEA studies, as depicted in Figure 5, Vietnam has emerged as the most frequently chosen setting, despite its recent involvement (highlighted in yellow). Among the 38 UAA documents set in Vietnam, 29 were co-authored by at least one scholar from Vietnam, while the remaining nine were authored by scholars from other countries (e.g. Wilkins and Annabi, 2023). The statistics for other countries are as follows: Malaysia (27 documents in total, with 23 co-authored by at least one scholar from Malaysia and 4 co-authored by scholars from other countries); Indonesia (16, 14 and 2); Singapore (16, 4 and 12); Thailand (8, 7 and 1); the Philippines (5, 0 and 5); Cambodia (3, 1 and 2); Laos (2, 0 and 2); Myanmar (1, 1 and 0); Brunei (0, 0 and 0) and Timor Leste (0, 0 and 0).

Additionally, there are several documents that selected SEA as the overall region for their setting while examining the issue of UAA. Among these documents, 103 were co-authored by scholars from SEA countries, while the other 12 were co-authored by scholars from non-SEA countries. For these documents, the respective keyword is “SEA in general” (see Figure 5).

Regarding the keywords, as shown in Figure 5 and Tables 8 and 9, on the one hand, numerous keywords are shared among studies in UAA in more than three SEA countries such as *quality assurance*, *governance*, *ASEAN*, *China* or *private funding*. On the other hand, many other keywords are shared among studies in UAA in two countries. For example, the keyword of *university rank* can be found in both studies in UAA in Indonesia and Thailand or the keywords of *capacity building* and *policy* can be found in both studies in UAA in Indonesia and Vietnam (see Table 8). Last but not least, each SEA country may have its own interest while conducting studies on the UAA topic. For instance, UAA in Vietnam’s documents has some specific keywords such as *university governance*, *block grant budget* or *the Humboldtian model*, which are not found in other publications of UAA in other SEA countries.

Table 7. Top 10 publications in university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia ranked by number of citations

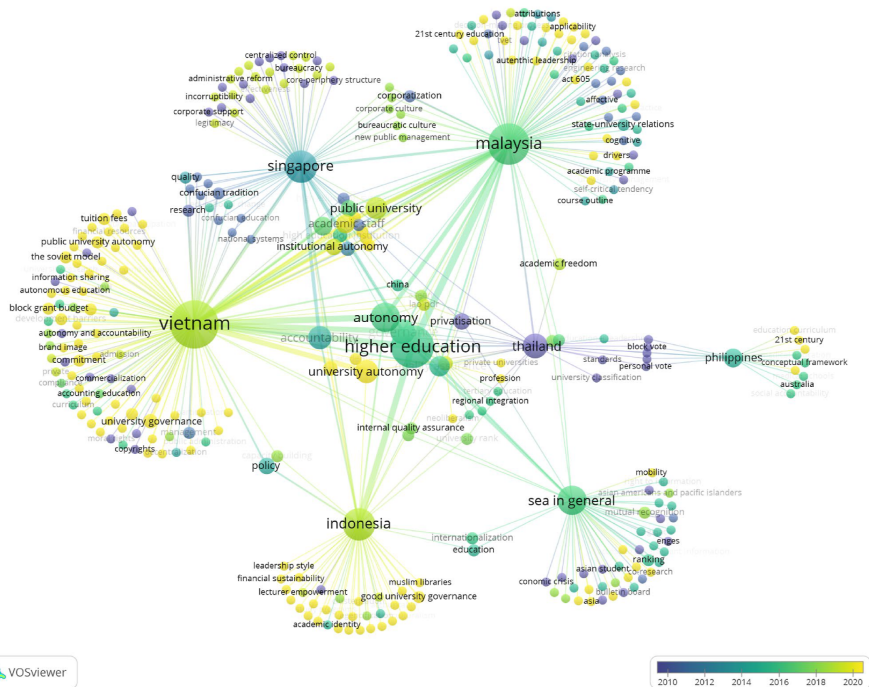
Rank	Author	Title	Author keyword	Source	Year	Number of citations
1	Marginson (2011a)	Higher Education in East Asia and Singapore: Rise of The Confucian Model	Asia–Pacific; China; comparative education; Confucian tradition; national systems; private funding; research; role of government	<i>Higher Education</i>	2011	352
2	Shin and Harman (2009)	New Challenges For Higher Education: Global And Asia–Pacific Perspectives	Economic crisis; education; governance; internationalization; higher mass; new challenges; privatization; ranking; world-class university	<i>Asia Pacific Education Review</i>	2009	161
3	Sirat (2010)	Strategic Planning Directions of Malaysia’s Higher Education: University Autonomy In The Midst of Political Uncertainties	Autonomy; Malaysia; political uncertainties; public universities; state-university relations; strategic plan	<i>Higher Education</i>	2010	84
4	Hayden and Thiep (2007)	Institutional Autonomy For Higher Education in Vietnam	NA	<i>Higher Education Research and Development</i>	2007	72
5	Nguyen (2016)	Building Human Resources Management Capacity for University Research: The Case at Four Leading Vietnamese Universities	Capacity building; human resources management; public administration; research leadership; research management; university research	<i>Higher Education</i>	2016	58
6	Lee (2004)	Global Trends, National Policies and Institutional Responses: Restructuring Higher Education in Malaysia	Corporatization; global trends; higher education; higher education reforms; privatization; restructuring	<i>Educational Research For Policy and Practice</i>	2004	49
7	Ng and Tan (2010)	The Singapore Global Schoolhouse: an Analysis of the Development of The Tertiary Education Landscape in Singapore	Centralized control; higher education; market economy; Singapore	<i>International Journal of Educational Management</i>	2010	46
8	Nguyen et al. (2017)	English-Medium Instruction and Self-Governance in Higher Education: The Journey of a Vietnamese University through the Institutional Autonomy Regime	English-medium instruction; higher education reforms; institutional autonomy; Vietnam higher education	<i>Higher Education</i>	2016	43

(continued)

Table 7. Continued

Rank	Author	Title	Author keyword	Source	Year	Number of citations
9	Jung et al. (2011)	Quality Assurance in Asian Distance Education: Diverse Approaches And Common Culture	Accreditation; distance education; E-learning; higher education; quality assurance	International Review Of Research In Open And Distance Learning	2011	41
10	Hou et al. (2015)	Quality Assurance of Quality Assurance Agencies From an Asian Perspective: Regulation, Autonomy and Accountability	External quality assurance; higher education; internal quality assurance; quality assurance agency	Asia Pacific Education Review	2015	31

Note(s): NA = Not available
 Source(s): Authors' own work



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 5. Network visualization map of co-keyword analysis of studies in university autonomy and accountability in Southeast Asia

Table 8. Shared keywords among studies in university autonomy and accountability in different countries in Southeast Asia

Countries	Shared keyword
SEA in general – Indonesia – Laos – Malaysia – Thailand – Vietnam	Quality assurance
SEA in general – Laos – Malaysia – Singapore – Thailand – Vietnam	Governance
Cambodia – Laos – Malaysia – Thailand – Vietnam	ASEAN
Laos – Malaysia – Singapore – Thailand – Vietnam	China
SEA in general – Cambodia – Malaysia – Singapore	Privatization
Singapore – Vietnam – Singapore – Vietnam	Private funding
Malaysia – Singapore – Vietnam	High education system; leadership; public university; university
SEA in general – Indonesia	Education; internationalization
SEA in general – Malaysia	Accreditation; open data
SEA in general – Vietnam	Internal quality assurance; quality assurance system
Cambodia – Vietnam	Academic
Indonesia – Singapore	Transparency
Indonesia – Thailand	University rank
Indonesia – Vietnam	Capacity building; policy
Malaysia – Singapore	Bureaucratic culture; collegial culture; corporate culture; corporatization; corporatization of universities; new public management; public statutory bodies
Malaysia – Thailand	Academic freedom
Malaysia – Vietnam	Academic staff; high education institution; higher education policy; higher education reform; institutional autonomy; international academic careers; offshore campuses; transnational education; transnational teaching
Philippines – Thailand	Block vote; candidate-centered electoral rules; district magnitude; electoral corruption; personal vote

Source(s): Authors' own work

Conclusion and implications

This study, to the best of our knowledge, is the first-ever attempt to systematically revise the literature on UAA in SEA. Specifically, UAA in SEA documents from the Scopus database were obtained and analyzed using a bibliometric approach, and different angles, including the historical development of UAA in SEA literature, geographic distribution, leading research institutions, researchers and research teams and the intellectual distribution of UAA in SEA studies, have been taken into consideration.

This bibliometric analysis yields implications for various stakeholders. Firstly, researchers interested in investigating the topic of UAA in SEA can utilize the study's findings for their literature review. This study aids in identifying longitudinal publication trends, key sources of publications, prominent authors and research groups and, notably, both well-researched and under-researched topics. Moreover, researchers studying UAA in other countries and regions can benefit from this study's output, offering a comparative perspective from SEA countries. For instance, future researchers may reuse or combine the keywords presented in [Table 9](#) as references or starting points for brainstorming their studies on UAA within their respective countries or regions. Secondly, governmental officers, policymakers and university leaders can utilize this study as a source of empirical evidence when making policy or management decisions. Furthermore, they can leverage the study's outputs, particularly the findings regarding top authors and research groups, when seeking advice from academia. Notably, the

Table 9. Specific keywords among studies in university autonomy and accountability of each country in Southeast Asia

Country	Keywords (frequency)
Cambodia	Higher education (2); academic (1); ASEAN (1); Malaysia (1); privatization (1); Singapore (1); Thailand (1) Indonesia (1); neoliberalism (1); political liberalization (1); private universities (1); profession (1); regional integration (1); tertiary education (1); university standards (1)
Indonesia	Higher education (7); accountability (2); autonomy (2); policy (2); Singapore (2); transparency (2); capacity building (1); education (1); internationalization (1); Malaysia (1); quality assurance (1); Thailand (1); university autonomy (1); university rank (1) Good university governance (2); academic identity (1); accountable (1); agencification (1); clusterization (1); control (1); covid-19 pandemic (1); democratic-transformative leadership (1); e government (1); financial sustainability (1); globalization in higher education (1); governance model (1); improvement (1); income-generating (1); Indonesian higher education (1); laboratory (1); leadership style (1); lecturer empowerment (1); multiculturalism (1); Muslim libraries (1); neoliberal governance (1); new normal era (1); organizational citizenship behavior (1); post-pandemic of covid-19 (1); public perception (1); quality programmes (1); student evaluation of teaching (1); student feedback (1); study programs (1); teacher evaluation (1); tracer study (1); transformational leadership (1)
Laos	ASEAN (1); autonomy (1); China (1); governance (1); higher education (1); Malaysia (1); quality assurance (1); Thailand (1); Vietnam (1)
Malaysia	Higher education (8); autonomy (5); public university (5); academic staff (3); Singapore (3); Vietnam (3); corporatization (2); governance (2); international academic careers (2); leadership (2); offshore campuses (2); quality assurance (2); Thailand (2); transnational education (2); transnational teaching (2); academic freedom (1); accreditation (1); ASEAN (1); bureaucratic culture (1); China (1); collegial culture (1); corporate culture (1); corporatization of universities (1); high education institution (1); high education system (1); higher education policy (1); higher education reform (1); institutional autonomy (1); new public management (1); open data (1); privatization (1); public statutory bodies (1); university (1) State-university relations (2); 21st century education (1); academic performance (1); academic programme (1); act 605 (1); affective (1); applicability (1); assessment literacy (1); assessment practice (1); attributions (1); authentic leadership (1); budget (1); citation analysis (1); cognitive (1); conative (1); course outline (1); decision-making process (1); disclosure (1); drivers (1); educational technology (1); effective leadership (1); effective women leaders (1); engineering research (1); English as a second language (1); financial reporting and disclosure (1); fraud prevention (1); fund all (1); funding (1); global trends (1); h indices (1); international student (1); it governance (1); it governance framework (1); learning outcomes (1); lecturers (1); legislation (1); life and career skills (1); micro-credentials (1); modified accountability disclosure (1); monitoring (1); occasion reduction implication (1); open science (1); performance-based funding (1); political uncertainties (1); publication productivity (1); readiness studies (1); research data sharing (1); research performance (1); restructuring (1); scholarly communication (1); scientometrics assessment (1); self-critical tendency (1); strategic development planning (1); strategic plan (1); teacher-centredness (1); teaching and learning process (1); theory of reasoned action (1); transferable skills (1); tvet (1); types of assessments (1); university development (1); university leaders (1); university management (1); university reporting (1); vision (1); websites (1)
Philippines	Block vote (1); candidate-centered electoral rules (1); district magnitude (1); electoral corruption (1); personal vote (1); Thailand (1) 21st century (1); Australia (1); conceptual framework (1); education curriculum (1); medical education (1); medical schools (1); mpa/mpse (1); public sector management (1); social accountability (1)
SEA in general	Higher education (3); quality assurance (2); accreditation (1); education (1); governance (1); internal quality assurance (1); internationalization (1); open data (1); privatization (1); quality assurance system (1) Mutual recognition (2); ranking (2); access to government information (1); Asia (1); Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (1); Asian student (1); bulletin board (1); chat room (1); economic crisis (1); co-research (1); distance education (1); east Asia (1); e-learning (1); enges (1); Europe (1); external quality assurance (1); freedom of information (1); gıqac (1); global competitiveness (1); global era (1); international accreditation (1); international quality assurance network (1); mass higher (1); mobility (1); native speaker (1); new call (1); open government (1); program evaluation (1); proximal development (1); quality assurance agency (1); records management (1); research centers (1); research evaluation (1); right to information (1); sdg4 (1); Thorstein Veblen (1); Tokyo convention (1); workplace inquiry (1); world class university (1); youth violence prevention (1)

(continued)

Table 9. Continued

Country	Keywords (frequency)
Singapore	<i>Accountability (4); higher education (4); Vietnam (4); confucian tradition (2); Asia-Pacific (1); autonomy (1); bureaucratic culture (1); China (1); collegial culture (1); comparative education (1); confucian education (1); corporate culture (1); corporatization (1); corporatization of universities (1); educational change (1); external advisory groups (1); governance (1); high education system (1); leadership (1); national systems (1); new public management (1); private funding (1); private tutoring (1); privatization (1); public statutory bodies (1); public university (1); quality (1); research (1); role of government (1); selective institution (1); Thailand (1); transparency (1); university (1)</i> <i>Administrative reform (1); bureaucracy (1); centralized control (1); core-periphery structure (1); corporate support (1); democracy (1); dependency (1); effectiveness (1); Fiji (1); good governance (1); governance relations (1); government role (1); Hong Kong (1); impartiality (1); incorruptibility (1); integrity (1); integrity violations (1); Kadavu (1); lawfulness (1); legitimacy (1); market economy (1); policy formation (1); public values (1); public-private partnerships (1); quality of governance (1); research assessments (1); service quality (1); village mode of production (1)</i>
Thailand	<i>Higher education (2); academic freedom (1); ASEAN (1); autonomy (1); block vote (1); candidate-centered electoral rules (1); China (1); district magnitude (1); electoral corruption (1); governance (1); personal vote (1); quality assurance (1); university autonomy (1); university rank (1); vietnam (1)</i> <i>Educational leadership (1); standards (1); university classification (1)</i>
Vietnam	<i>Autonomy (7); higher education (7); governance (6); university autonomy (6); academic staff (4); institutional autonomy (3); university (3); accountability (2); China (2); confucian tradition (2); high education institution (2); higher education reform (2); international academic careers (2); leadership (2); offshore campuses (2); policy (2); public university (2); quality assurance (2); research (2); transnational education (2); transnational teaching (2); academic (1); ASEAN (1); asia-pacific (1); capacity building (1); comparative education (1); confucian education (1); educational change (1); external advisory groups (1); high education system (1); higher education policy (1); internal quality assurance (1); national systems (1); private funding (1); private tutoring (1); quality (1); quality assurance system (1); role of government (1); selective institution (1)</i> <i>University governance (3); block grant budget (2); commitment (2); development barriers (2); management (2); public university autonomy (2); the Humboldtian model (2); the napoleonic model (2); the Soviet model (2); tuition fees (2); accountability performance (1); accounting education (1); admission (1); assessment (1); autonomous education (1); autonomy and accountability (1); barriers to qa (1); brand image (1); capacity of qa staff (1); centralization (1); commercialization (1); compliance (1); copyrights (1); curriculum (1); curriculum development (1); data envelopment analysis (dea) (1); decentralization (1); economic efficiency (1); effectiveness of staff participation (1); English-medium instruction (1); faculty (1); finance (1); financial resources (1); goal consensus (1); higher education governance models (1); human resources (1); human resources management (1); Humboldt's philosophy (1); impact study (1); indicator (1); industrial property (1); information sharing (1); institutional accreditation (1); institutions (1); intellectual property (1); internal and external enablers to qa (1); international trends (1); linkages between public universities (1); modernization (1); moral rights (1); multivariate analysis of covariance (mancova) (1); non-public (1); organizational-personnel (1); participation (1); participation of all (1); patents (1); plagiarism (1); private (1); public administration (1); public university affiliation (1); quality culture (1); reform (1); research leadership (1); research management (1); staff (1); staff participation (1); state control (1); teaching curriculum (1); teaching of intellectual property (1); technology licensing (1); trust (1); universities in Vietnam (1); university autonomy competence (1); university brand values (1); university education (1); university research (1); university social responsibility (1); Vietnam higher education (1); Vietnam Today (1); Vietnamese case (1); VNU (1)</i>

Note(s): Keywords in *italic* are found in only one respective country; underlined keywords are found in at least two countries

Source(s): Authors' own work

discovery that numerous scholars originating from outside SEA also study UAA in the region implies that the knowledge base of this research topic extends beyond SEA countries, encompassing external sources as well.

Limitations and future studies

This study, like many others, contains flaws that require further investigation in the future. Firstly, due to the nature of bibliometric analysis, we have confined ourselves to utilizing only

metadata for our investigation. This limitation could be addressed in subsequent studies by delving deeper into the content of the UAA in SEA studies, which undoubtedly would provide greater insights into the research issue. Secondly, we have not considered publications that are not indexed in Scopus. Future studies are advised to incorporate publications from databases other than Scopus, such as WOS, theses and dissertations from ProQuest, or even publications in non-English languages. This will mitigate the bias stemming from relying solely on a single database like the current one.

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