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The Impact of Policies, Career Development Opportunities, and Working Conditions on the Work Performance of Lecturers in Public Universities: From the Practice in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract: High-quality lecturers play an important role in improving the quality of training and scientific research at public universities. However, attracting and retaining this team is facing many challenges due to competition from other educational institutions, working conditions, remuneration and career development opportunities. The article uses qualitative research methods, combining quantitative methods based on a survey of 484 lecturers in three target groups of 6 universities representing the North, Central and South regions. The research results show that there are 4 factors affecting the effectiveness of attracting high-quality lecturers according to the level of important influence: Recognition; Working conditions; Empowerment; Career development opportunities at public universities. At the same time, it proposes a number of solutions for state management agencies to focus on building an autonomous mechanism, improving welfare, improving the working environment and establishing a transparent recognition and reward system.

Keywords: High Quality; Attractive; Faculty; University; Public.

1. Introduction

Talent is an important resource that determines the sustainable development and prosperity of each country. In the field of higher education, high-quality lecturers not only play a key role in teaching and scientific research but also contribute to improving the position and training quality of public universities (Hong & An, 2020). Recognizing this, the Party and State of Vietnam have issued many policies to attract, use and retain high-quality lecturers in the higher education system, reflected in resolutions and strategies for developing higher education human resources (Government of Vietnam, 2018).

However, in the context of international integration and digital transformation, the policy of attracting and retaining high-quality lecturers at public universities in Vietnam is facing many challenges. Several studies have shown that public universities are increasingly losing their attractiveness to good lecturers due to uncompetitive remuneration mechanisms, inflexible working environments, high pressure on teaching and research, and limited promotion opportunities (Phong, 2021). At the same time, the strong development of private universities and international educational institutions has created a vibrant labor market, making it difficult for public universities to maintain high-quality lecturers (Hoa & Thinh, 2019).

According to data from the Ministry of Education and Training (2023), in the period 2015-2022, the number of lecturers leaving their jobs or moving to the private sector tends to increase, especially in highly specialized fields such as information technology, economics and natural sciences. This poses an urgent need to adjust and improve the policy of retaining high-quality lecturers to meet the development requirements of higher education in the new period (Ministry of Education and Training, 2023).

This article will analyze the current status of the policy to retain high-quality lecturers at public universities in Vietnam, clarify current challenges and propose some solutions to improve the effectiveness of this policy. Thereby, the study aims to build a professional, effective and sustainable public higher education system, contributing to improving the quality of training and scientific research in the context of global economic and social integration.

2. Theoretical overview

2.1. University lecturer

Lecturers, also known as “faculty members”, “lecturers”, or “professors” in English, are those who are involved in teaching and research in higher education institutions. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), lecturers are considered experts in their fields, responsible for teaching students, conducting scientific research and providing academic services to the community (OECD, 2017). In most countries, the role of lecturers is not only limited to imparting knowledge but also includes training and developing students, contributing to the development of science and technology, and participating in community service activities. Lecturers are highly qualified individuals who are recruited and appointed to perform teaching, scientific research and participating in academic activities in the higher education environment. From an international perspective, lecturers not only impart knowledge but also act as guides, inspire critical thinking and motivate students to learn (Knight, 2002). They are responsible for developing curriculum content, innovating teaching methods and contributing to the development of knowledge in their field of expertise (Altbach, 2011).

According to Article 59 of the Law on Higher Education 2012 (amended and supplemented in 2018), lecturers are people with high professional qualifications, recruited to higher education institutions to teach, conduct scientific research and participate in other activities serving the education work. Specifically, lecturers must have a master's degree or higher, have sufficient moral qualities, professional capacity and participate in scientific research, curriculum development and participate in other academic activities (Law on Higher Education, 2012). This also shows that lecturers are not only teachers but also participants in the process of improving and developing education and science.

Many research works in Vietnam have clarified the role and responsibility of lecturers in higher education. A study by Nguyen Thi Minh (2019) showed that lecturers not only play the role of knowledge transmitters but also guides, motivates and creates conditions for students to develop soft skills, scientific research, and creative thinking ability. Similarly, Le Thanh Huong (2020) in her study also affirmed that lecturers in Vietnam need to improve teaching methods to improve the quality of education, helping students access new scientific trends. According to Phan Xuan Trung (2020), lecturers are not only knowledge transmitters but also researchers, who directly contribute to the orientation of higher education development. Meanwhile, Nguyen Thi Lan Anh (2021) emphasized the role of lecturers as knowledge managers, who not only convey knowledge but also orient approaches for students in the context of digital transformation (Minh, 2019; Huong, 2020; Trung, 2020; Anh, 2021).

According to the author's point of view, lecturers are defined as: lecturers play a core role in the university education system, both as teachers and researchers, and as factors promoting innovation and knowledge development.

2.3 . High quality lecturers

In the world, the concept of high-quality faculty is mentioned in many studies and educational documents. According to Ramsden (2003), high-quality faculty are those who not only have deep expertise and advanced teaching methods but also actively contribute to scientific research, educational innovation and the development of the academic community. They are evaluated not only based on their academic qualifications but also on their ability to teach effectively, contribute valuable research and participate in building a positive academic environment.

The US Department of Education (US Department of Education, 2020) emphasizes that high-quality faculty must meet three main criteria:

High professional competence, demonstrated through academic qualifications, research experience and practical application.

Excellent teaching ability, demonstrated through the ability to communicate, motivate learning and apply modern teaching methods.

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Contribute to the development of the school and society, demonstrated through scientific research, international cooperation and connection with businesses.

2. 3. Some theories on attracting high-quality lecturers in public universities

*Motivation Theory:*Motivation theory plays an important role in attracting high-quality faculty, as it explains why faculty choose to work at a particular higher education institution. Herzberg (1959) proposed the two-factor theory, which divides factors that influence work motivation into two groups: hygiene factors and motivators. Hygiene factors include salary, benefits, working conditions, and management policies, while motivators include career development opportunities, recognition, and job challenge. If universities focus only on hygiene factors and ignore motivators, they will have difficulty retaining talented faculty (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). In addition, Vroom's expectancy theory (1964) is also meaningful in explaining faculty behavior when making decisions about where to work. According to Vroom (1964), faculty members will choose their work environment based on the degree to which they believe that their efforts will lead to high performance (expectancy), high performance will bring about appropriate rewards (instrumentality), and that the rewards are valuable to them (valence). Therefore, to attract faculty members, public universities need to build a fair compensation system, ensure that faculty members' contributions are recognized and rewarded appropriately, and provide a clear path for advancement to create long-term motivation (Vroom, 1964).

*Academic Labor Market Theory:*In addition to personal motivation, attracting high-quality faculty is also governed by the rules of the academic labor market. Altbach (2004) argues that the academic labor market is highly competitive, in which faculty tend to seek the best job opportunities in terms of salary, research environment, and academic reputation of the educational institution. Universities with strong financial resources, modern facilities, and good research support policies often have an advantage in attracting excellent faculty (Altbach, 2004). At the same time, Cappelli's (2008) theory of talent attraction strategy emphasizes that attracting talent depends not only on salary but also on employer branding, strong academic network, and career advancement opportunities. Accordingly, public universities need to invest in academic branding strategies, enhance international collaborations, and provide more promotion opportunities to increase their attractiveness to potential faculty (Cappelli, 2008).

*Higher Education HRM Theory:*In the context of higher education, Kristof-Brown's (2005) Person-Organization Fit theory suggests that faculty tend to stay long-term with universities whose values, culture, and goals align with their personal orientations. This fit is not only related to financial factors but also depends on the working environment, the level of autonomy in teaching and research, and support from administrators. Public universities need to build an open academic environment, encourage innovation, and create conditions for faculty professional development to attract and retain talent (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). In addition, Bass and Riggio's (2006) Transformational Leadership theory emphasizes the role of the management team in inspiring, encouraging innovation, and building a cohesive working environment. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), leaders with high vision and motivation will attract more talented lecturers and help them maximize their teaching and research capacity. This shows that, besides objective factors such as salary and facilities, the leadership style in universities is also an important factor in attracting high-quality lecturers (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

3. Research methods

This study uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate factors affecting the performance of lecturers at 6 public universities: the North region (University of Commerce; Academy of Policy and Development), the Central region (University of Economics - Hue University; Khanh Hoa University); the South (University of Social Sciences and Humanities Ho Chi Minh City; Ho Chi Minh City University of Technical Education). These scales were selected based on their relevance to the context of non-financial remuneration and performance of high-quality lecturers at public universities. REC: Recognition; WC: Working conditions; EMP: Empowerment; CDO: Career development opportunities; EP: Efficiency of high-quality lecturers. This study focused on researchers working at the 6 universities mentioned above. The minimum sample size was determined to be 384 people, however the author sampled 448 questionnaires to ensure reliability. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation from a variety of organizations, including private research institutes and independent research centers. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed both electronically and in person. The actual data collection results in 448 valid and officially used questionnaires in the study.

Table 1. Research sample structure

STT	Characteristic	Number (people)	Rate (%)
I	**Gender**	**448**	**100**
1	Female	136	68
2	Male	312	69.6
II	**Title**	**448**	**100**
	Lecturer with Master's degree	28	6.3
	Lecturers with PhD degree or higher	360	80.4
	Lecturer holding concurrent management position	60	6.7
3	**Seniority**	**448**	**100**
	Under 5 years	62	13.8
	From 5 to under 10 years	150	33.5
	From 10 years to less than 15 years	178	39.7
	15 years or more	58	12.9

(Source: Data processing results on SPSS 26.0)

From Table 1 on the sample size of the study, it can be seen that the total number of lecturers participating in the survey was 448 people. Of these, there were 136 women (68%) and 312 men (69.6%), showing that the proportion of men was slightly higher than that of women. The majority of lecturers had a PhD degree or higher (80.4%), while the number of lecturers with a Master's degree accounted for only 6.3%. In addition, 6.7% of lecturers held concurrent management positions. The majority of lecturers had teaching experience from 10 to less than 15 years (39.7%) and from 5 to less than 10 years (33.5%). The number of lecturers with less than 5 years of experience accounted for 13.8%, while the number of lecturers with 15 years or more of seniority accounted for 12.9%.

Survey results were cleaned and processed on SPSS 26.0 software with techniques such as testing the reliability of the scale using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient; exploratory factor analysis EFA, correlation analysis and linear regression.

4. Research results

4.1. Testing the reliability of the scale

4.1.1. Testing by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient

The results of testing the reliability of the scales using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient showed that all research variables met the reliability requirements. The Recognition variable (REC) had a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.708, indicating acceptable reliability with 4 questions.

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The working conditions variable (WC) also achieved a similar value, with a coefficient of 0.708 from 5 questions. The empowerment variable (EMP) achieved a higher coefficient 0.887, indicating very high reliability with 5 questions. The career development opportunity variable (CDO) had a coefficient of 0.906, showing very good reliability with 4 questions. Finally, the variable of high-quality lecturer utilization efficiency (EP) also had a coefficient of 0.876, indicating that this scale had good reliability.

4.1.2. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

The results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed that the KMO value was 0.798, indicating that the data were suitable for factor analysis, and the Bartlett's Test result was statistically significant (Sig. = 0.000), confirming the correlation between the variables. The original data with 18 observed variables was reduced to 4 main factors based on the Eigen value criterion > 1, explaining 62.726% of the total variance. Specifically, factor 1 explained 21.128%, factor 2 explained 16.729%, factor 3 explained 12.969%, and factor 4 explained 11.900%. After Varimax rotation, the factors were redistributed in variance, which increased clarity and significance. The "Rotated Component Matrix" table shows the relationship between observed variables and factors: Factor 1 includes variables EMP5, EMP3, EMP4, EMP2, EMP1, reflecting empowerment; factor 2 includes variables CDO1, CDO2, CDO4, CDO3, reflecting career development opportunities; factor 3 includes variables WC4, WC5, WC3, WC1, WC2, related to working conditions; and factor 4 includes variables REC1, REC4, REC3, REC2, related to recognition.

Table 3. Rotated factor matrix table

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
EMP5	.917			
EMP3	.876			
EMP4	.873			
EMP2	.796			
EMP1	.672			
CDO1		.889		
CDO2		.882		
CDO4		.878		
CDO3		.873		
WC4			.776	
WC5			.723	
WC3			.657	
WC1			.620	
WC2			.609	
REC1				.769
REC4				.760
REC3				.740
REC2				.726
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

4.1.3. Correlation analysis

The results of the correlation table analysis show the relationship between the variables REC (Recognition), WC (Working Conditions), EMP (Empowerment), CDO (Career Development Opportunities) and EP (Work Performance). The Pearson correlation coefficient indicates that EMP has the strongest and most positive relationship with EP (r = 0.324, Sig. = 0.001), indicating that employee empowerment has a significant impact on work performance. Similarly, CDO also has a positive impact on EP (r= 0.262, Sig.= 0.002), emphasizing that providing career development opportunities plays an important role in improving work performance. In contrast, the remaining variables such as WC and REC have a weaker relationship with EP (correlation coefficients are r = 0.124 and r = 0.107, with Sig. 0.002 and 0.004, respectively).

Table 4. Results of correlation analysis between variables

Correlations						
		REC	WC	EMP	CDO	EP
REC	Pearson Correlation	1	.027	-.036	-.064	.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.693	.592	.339	.002
	N	224	224	224	224	224
WC	Pearson Correlation	.027	1	-.052	.089	.124
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.693		.439	.184	.004
	N	224	224	224	224	224
EMP	Pearson Correlation	-.036	-.052	1	.128	.324 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.592	.439		.056	.001
	N	224	224	224	224	224
CDO	Pearson Correlation	-.064	.089	.128	1	.262
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.339	.184	.056		.002
	N	224	224	224	224	224
EP	Pearson Correlation	.107	.124	.324 **	.262	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.004	.001	.002	
	N	224	224	224	224	224
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						

4.1.4. Linear regression

In the regression model, independent variables such as Career Development Opportunities (CDO), Recognition (REC), Working Conditions (WC), and Empowerment (EMP) were entered to predict work performance (EP). The Enter method was used, ensuring that all the independent variables were considered simultaneously without any exclusion.

The analysis results show a strong relationship between these factors and job performance, with a correlation coefficient of R = 0.873. The R Square value is 0.763, indicating that 76.3% of the variation in job performance can be explained by the variables in the model. After

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adjustment, the Adjusted R Square value is 0.728, indicating that the model still has a good fit. The standard error value of 0.66298 reflects the accuracy in predicting job performance.

The Durbin-Watson index is 2.063, within the allowable range (1.5 to 2.5), indicating that there is no autocorrelation between the residuals, ensuring the accuracy of the model. The ANOVA table tests the model's suitability with an F value of 3.065 and a significance level of p = 0.03, demonstrating that the linear regression model is statistically significant. The total variance is divided into two parts: the variance due to regression (87.364) and the residual variance (14.284), indicating that the model explains most of the variance in the data.

Table 5. Regression coefficients

Coefficients [a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3,047	.440		6,919	.000
	REC	.110	.068	.116	.144	.003
	WC	.201	.079	.210	.017	.002
	EMP	.328	.066	.331	3,477	.001
	CDO	.242	.055	.251	.764	.001

a. Dependent Variable: EP

The standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients provide further insight into the influence of each independent variable. The variable REC (Recognition) has a standardized Beta = 0.116, p = 0.003, indicating that recognition has a small but significant impact on performance. The variable WC (Working Conditions) has a Beta = 0.210, p = 0.002, indicating that working conditions have a strong and significant influence. EMP (Empowerment) is the most influential factor with a Beta = 0.331, p = 0.001, confirming the important role of empowerment in improving performance. CDO (Career Development Opportunity) has a Beta = 0.251, p = 0.001, demonstrating that development opportunities also contribute significantly to employee performance. The intercept coefficient (Constant = 3.047) reflects the baseline performance without the effects of independent variables.

From this, the standardized regression equation is established:

$$EP = 0.331EMP + 0.251CDO + 0.210WC + 0.116REC + \varepsilon$$

The above standardized regression equation shows the level of influence of each factor on the work performance (EP) of high-quality lecturers at public universities in Vietnam.

Empowerment (EMP) has a Beta coefficient of 0.331, which is the strongest factor. This shows that when lecturers are more empowered, they tend to work more effectively.

Professional Development Opportunities (CDO) has a Beta = 0.251, indicating that providing faculty with opportunities for professional development and advancement has a significant impact on their performance.

Working conditions (WC) with Beta = 0.210 also plays an important role, reflecting that a favorable working environment helps lecturers improve productivity.

Recognition (REC) has a Beta = 0.116, a smaller but still statistically significant effect, emphasizing that recognizing faculty contributions improves work performance.

The intercept coefficient (Constant = 3.047) shows the baseline performance level without the effects of independent factors.

This equation helps managers understand the need to prioritize empowerment, career development, and improved working conditions to attract and retain high-quality faculty.

5. Policy implications

From the research results on factors affecting the performance of high-quality lecturers, it can be seen that human resource management policies in public higher education need to focus on enhancing autonomy, improving working conditions, creating career development opportunities and recognizing the contributions of lecturers. To achieve this goal, state management agencies need to make appropriate policy adjustments to improve the quality of the teaching staff, contributing to the sustainable development of public higher education in Vietnam.

First, increase the empowerment of lecturers to improve work motivation. Research results show that empowerment (EMP) is the factor that has the strongest influence on the work performance of lecturers. Therefore, state management agencies need to build a clear academic autonomy mechanism, allowing lecturers to participate more deeply in the decision-making process on curriculum, teaching methods and research activities. In addition, it is necessary to decentralize management in the direction of increasing the authority and responsibility of lecturers in organizing subjects, guiding students and participating in international academic activities. A two-way feedback mechanism between lecturers and school leaders also needs to be established, in order to create a democratic working environment where lecturers feel their voices are heard and respected.

Second, expanding career development opportunities to create long-term motivation for lecturers. Career development opportunities (CDO) are a factor that significantly affects work performance, showing that lecturers tend to work more effectively when they have the opportunity to improve their professional qualifications and advance their careers. Therefore, state management agencies need to develop policies to support lecturers in participating in domestic and international training and development programs, and at the same time expand opportunities for research cooperation with foreign universities. The evaluation and promotion system needs to be designed to be transparent and fair, creating conditions for lecturers to develop according to their capacity and contributions. Ensuring a clear promotion path will help lecturers have the motivation to strive and stay with public universities for a long time.

Third, improve working conditions to ensure a quality teaching and research environment. Working conditions (WC) have a strong impact on the performance of lecturers, showing that a modern and comfortable working environment will help lecturers maximize their capacity. Therefore, it is necessary to have investment policies to upgrade facilities and teaching and research equipment at public universities. In addition, it is necessary to build a reasonable remuneration regime, ensuring a competitive income level to attract and retain high-quality lecturers. Policies on insurance, health care and housing support for lecturers also need attention, in order to create favorable conditions for them to focus on teaching and scientific research.

Fourth, increase recognition and honor for lecturers to improve work motivation. Although recognition (REC) has a smaller impact than other factors, it still plays an important role in promoting work performance. State management agencies need to build a transparent and fair reward system, promptly recognizing the contributions of lecturers in teaching and research. In addition to state-level awards, there should be prestigious titles in the education sector to honor outstanding lecturers, and at the same time encourage universities to organize programs to honor lecturers with outstanding contributions. The culture of respecting and recognizing the value of lecturers needs to be spread not only within the school but also throughout society, thereby contributing to enhancing the position of the teaching profession in the Vietnamese education system .

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Fifth, perfecting policies to attract and retain high-quality lecturers for sustainable development of the public higher education system. State management agencies need to develop strategies to attract talent, especially young lecturers with potential, through scholarship programs, financial support and job opportunities at public universities. Labor contract policies need to be adjusted in a flexible manner while still ensuring stability, helping lecturers feel secure in their long-term commitment to the school. In addition, promoting the application of technology in human resource management and supporting lecturers in accessing research resources is also an important solution to improve the work efficiency and contributions of lecturers.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed the factors affecting the performance of high-quality lecturers at public universities in Vietnam, thereby proposing policy implications to attract and retain this group of lecturers. The results showed that empowerment, career development opportunities, working conditions and recognition all have significant impacts on lecturer performance, of which empowerment has the strongest influence. Therefore, state management agencies need to focus on building autonomy mechanisms, enhancing welfare, improving the working environment and establishing transparent recognition and reward systems. The synchronous implementation of these policies will help increase work motivation, attract and retain high-quality lecturers, thereby improving the quality of public university education, contributing to the development of highly qualified human resources for the country.

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Conflict of interest declaration

The authors declare that the research results do not conflict with any organization or individual.

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