

# Professional skills development for University lecturers: A case study in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam

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# Abstract

The quality of university education critically depends on the professional competencies of its teaching staff, which must align with ongoing educational reforms and global integration. Despite this, little research has investigated professional skills development for university lecturers in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region a region facing unique socioeconomic and educational challenges. This study investigates the current state of lecturers' professional skills and examines the design and implementation of related training activities. Using a survey-based quantitative research design, data were collected from 530 participants, including 108 managers and 422 lecturers from 11 public universities. Results reveal a high level of competency in general teaching and community-related skills but expose significant gaps in scientific research, academic writing, and digital transformation. Moreover, a critical discrepancy exists between the perceived necessity of professional development programs and their actual implementation, especially in training formats (mean = 3.51), indicating systemic inefficiencies. These findings underscore the urgent need for more targeted, practical, and responsive training strategies. The study contributes to educational policy and faculty development discourse by highlighting how structured, context-specific professional development initiatives can enhance teaching quality and research capacity in Vietnam and similar developing regions.

Keywords: Lecturers, Professional skills, Skills development, Training activities, Vietnam.

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# **1. Introduction**

University lecturers are pivotal to the advancement of higher education, acting as facilitators of knowledge, mentors, researchers, and contributors to societal development. Their role extends far beyond delivering lectures; they shape student outcomes, foster critical thinking, and promote lifelong learning [1-3]. As the global higher education sector intensifies its focus on quality assurance and competitiveness, university lecturers are expected to possess a wide range of professional skills. These include pedagogical expertise, digital proficiency, research capability, interpersonal communication, and reflective practice [4-6]. Professional development is integral to equipping lecturers with the skills required to address diverse learner needs and respond effectively to evolving academic and technological landscapes. High-quality training programs emphasize practical application, sustained support, and collaborative learning [7-9]. Technological integration, for instance, is increasingly necessary as lecturers navigate online and hybrid teaching environments. Competence in digital tools such as learning management systems and virtual collaboration platforms enhances teaching effectiveness and accessibility [10, 11].

Despite the global emphasis on upskilling academic staff, professional development for university lecturers in Vietnam, particularly in underrepresented regions like the Mekong Delta, remains inconsistent and under-researched. Numerous barriers hinder progress, including limited institutional resources, traditional teaching norms, and insufficient training in digital and research competencies [12-14]. The lack of mentoring structures and feedback mechanisms further compounds these challenges, often leaving lecturers without the necessary guidance to grow professionally [15, 16]. Empirical studies from other contexts underscore the connection between professional development and lecturer performance. Aishath et al. [17] found a significant correlation between engagement in professional training and improved lecturer competencies in higher education. Similarly, Superi and Naqshbandi [18] observed that faculty competency significantly influences student academic performance, particularly when coupled with motivation. The broader learning environment, including training infrastructure and institutional support, is also critical for fostering professional growth [19, 20]. However, no comprehensive study has systematically evaluated professional competencies and training structures among lecturers in Vietnam's Mekong Delta—an economically and educationally diverse region critical to the country's national development. Addressing this gap is vital for ensuring equitable and quality-driven faculty development across all regions.

Although Vietnam's education reform emphasizes improving faculty quality, the professional skills of university lecturers in the Mekong Delta region remain inadequately assessed. There is also limited evidence on how current training programs align with national integration goals, educational reform needs, and technological transitions. This lack of data hampers the development of effective, localized strategies for faculty improvement. This study seeks to assess the current status of professional skills among university lecturers in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam and evaluate the design and implementation of professional skills development activities for lecturers in the context of Vietnam's educational reform and integration efforts. Based on these research objectives, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What is the current status of professional skills among university lecturers in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam?

2. How can professional skills development activities be effectively designed and implemented to align with Vietnam's educational reform priorities and integration goals?

# 2. Literature Review

#### 2.1. Professional Skills

Professional skills represent a comprehensive set of competencies, including technical, interpersonal, and adaptive skills crucial for the academic and developmental roles of university lecturers. These include both hard skills (e.g., research methodology, ICT proficiency) and soft skills (e.g., emotional intelligence, mentorship, and teamwork) [2, 21]. In the higher education context, these skills underpin teaching quality, institutional engagement, and scholarly contributions. Recent studies emphasize that competency gaps remain a global concern. For example, Camacho et al. [22] found that post-pandemic transitions exposed deficits in digital literacy and pedagogical adaptability. Similarly, Baumann and Leišytė [23] highlighted that structural changes in non-traditional university sectors have redefined the competencies required from academic staff. In Vietnam, however, systematic assessment of these competencies—especially in underserved regions like the Mekong Delta—remains underexplored. The lack of localized, empirical data limits the ability to design context-appropriate development programs.

Moreover, the relationship between lecturer competencies and student performance has been empirically validated across diverse contexts. Superi and Naqshbandi [18] found that lecturer skills significantly influence student academic performance, especially when paired with motivation. Likewise, Aishath et al. [17] demonstrated that professional development programs are positively correlated with faculty competencies and overall institutional effectiveness. Yet, in many developing regions, lecturers lack access to such programs or find them misaligned with their actual professional needs [24].

#### 2.2. Models of Professional Skills Development for University Lecturers

Theoretical models offer a multidimensional framework for developing lecturers' professional competencies. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model [25] advocates for reflective practice through a continuous learning cycle of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation. In parallel, Guskey's [26] Model of Teacher Change [26] emphasizes outcome-based transformations, asserting that shifts in educator beliefs are often driven by tangible improvements in student learning outcomes. Technology-specific models such as the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework [27] and Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) model [28] highlight the integrated expertise required to combine subject content effectively, pedagogy, and technology. These models have become increasingly critical as lecturers are required to teach in hybrid and fully online formats a transition notably accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic [10, 11].

Furthermore, collaborative learning models like Wenger's Community of Practice [29] stress the importance of social interaction and shared experiences in professional development. Extending Wenger's work, Ismailov et al. [30] demonstrated how community-based learning environments also help bridge linguistic and cultural barriers, particularly in English-medium instruction contexts. Despite the richness and relevance of these theoretical frameworks, many higher education systems in Southeast Asia, including Vietnam, have not consistently integrated them into institutional strategies. Development programs are frequently introduced in a top-down manner, often without sufficient attention to local needs, cultural contexts, or the active involvement and agency of lecturers themselves [12, 14]. For professional development pathways to be contextually responsive and sustainable, these gaps must be filled.

## 2.3. Essential Professional Skills for University Lecturers

Beyond subject expertise, university lecturers must now cultivate strong pedagogical and technological competencies to meet the evolving demands of higher education. Brookfield [31] argues that teaching effectiveness increasingly hinges on reflective practice, inclusive pedagogy, and the adoption of student-centered learning approaches. In addition to mastering their disciplines, lecturers must be adept at designing adaptable content that serves diverse learners, utilizing innovative methods such as flipped classrooms, blended learning, and project-based learning strategies. The ability to foster critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration among students has become a benchmark of contemporary instructional excellence.

Moreover, research capacity remains an indispensable dimension of faculty professionalism. Sysoyev et al. [16] point out that skills in academic writing, creating hypotheses, and participating in scholarly communities are essential for maintaining research quality and making valuable contributions to global knowledge. Nevertheless, significant barriers persist, particularly in the Global South, where limited access to research funding, mentorship, and institutional support continues to hinder research productivity and career progression [24, 32].

Simultaneously, digital competency has emerged as a foundational skillset for modern lecturers. Faculty members are now expected to navigate e-learning platforms, ensure data privacy compliance, and implement effective online assessment techniques. Bong and Chen [4] emphasize that digital accessibility must be treated as a core component of equity and inclusion in education. In Vietnam, differences in access to technology and training resources have resulted in inconsistent use of digital teaching methods, making it difficult to achieve broad educational improvements.

## 2.4. The Development of Professional Skills for University Lecturers

Effective professional development (PD) involves structured, iterative, and context-responsive training aligned with national policies and institutional needs. Vietnam's reform agenda recognizes this need but continues to face implementation gaps, especially in under-resourced areas [13, 24, 33]. PD initiatives typically focus on three pillars: teaching excellence, research capability, and leadership skills. These can be cultivated through blended learning, peer mentoring, experiential case-based teaching, and international collaboration [26, 34]. Programs that align with lecturers' personal development goals are more likely to succeed [35]. However, several studies warn of the disconnect between training design and real-world needs. For example, Herawati [36] evaluated LMS platforms and found that unless faculty input was integrated into design processes, engagement levels dropped. Similarly, Budi et al. [37] argue that the integration of HR perspectives into PD planning can significantly boost lecturer commitment and retention. Crucially, Vietnam lacks formal longitudinal assessments of how PD influences faculty performance or student outcomes. The current study aims to fill this gap by focusing on empirical evidence from a previously underrepresented region. To create evidence-based policies that improve the teaching and research standing of universities across the country, this gap must be filled.

#### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative survey research design, which is well-suited for examining perceptions and selfreported competencies across a large, geographically dispersed population. Given the goal of assessing professional skills and development activities among university lecturers and administrators across 11 public universities in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region, the survey method offers several advantages. It allows the collection of standardized data, facilitates comparison across respondent groups (lecturers and managers), and supports the generation of statistically analyzable insights [38]. The survey design is particularly appropriate in this context for three reasons. For accessibility and scalability, surveying enables broad participation across institutions with varying administrative structures, thereby increasing generalizability within the regional context. For anonymity, participants may respond more openly to questions related to perceived skill gaps or institutional limitations, reducing social desirability bias. For benchmarking capabilities, survey responses can be quantified to detect trends and gaps across skill categories and training dimensions. However, survey research is not without limitations. Potential response biases, including self-reporting inaccuracies and social desirability effects, may impact the validity of findings. To mitigate these risks, the survey instrument was carefully designed using clear, neutral language and administered with confidentiality assurances. Furthermore, triangulation with manager assessments provides a secondary lens to crossvalidate lecturer responses. Still, non-response bias remains a concern; although the response rate was high, those who chose not to participate may systematically differ in perspective.

#### 3.2. Participants

This study surveyed 530 participants from 11 public universities in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, including managers, university council members, principals, vice principals, department heads, and lecturers. The sample was divided between universities managed by Central Ministries and Branches (7 universities) and those under provincial or city administration (4 universities). The former accounted for 388 participants (73.2%), while the latter had 142 participants (26.8%). In total,

108 managers and 422 lecturers participated. Regarding experience, 45% of respondents had between 21 and 30 years of experience, 33% had over 30 years, 20% had between 10 and 20 years, and only 2% had less than 10 years. This data indicates that 78% of respondents had over two decades of professional experience, highlighting a highly experienced sample. Additionally, 45% of the surveyed managers and lecturers were female. In terms of academic qualifications, 33% of respondents held doctoral degrees. Ethical considerations were maintained, ensuring participants' voluntary involvement, confidentiality, and anonymity, with no requirement to disclose personal or institutional details. The study's sample composition demonstrates a broad representation of academic professionals, with a significant proportion of experienced individuals and a substantial percentage holding doctoral degrees.

## 3.3. Instruments

The scale for assessing the professional skills of lecturers includes 48 observed variables used to assess the perceptions of managers and lecturers about the level of competence of lecturers. Forty-eight observed variables include eight components. The first component is the general skills of lecturers in professional activities at higher education institutions, including 9 observed variables (e.g., skills in the role of academic advisor). The second component is the university teaching skills of lecturers, including 7 observed variables (e.g., skills in guiding students to self-study and self-research). The third component is the scientific research and scientific report writing skills of lecturers, which include six observed variables (e.g., teamwork skills in scientific research). The fourth element is the lecturer's skills in participating in professional activities and consulting and supporting learners, including four observed variables (e.g., skills in developing training programs). The fifth element is the lecturer's skills in coordinating between the school and stakeholders in training, including 5 variables (e.g., skills in coordinating with businesses). The sixth element is the lecturer's digital transformation skills, which include four variables (e.g., skills in applying information and communication technology to teaching). The seventh element is the lecturer's innovation skills, which include four variables (e.g., skills in bridging science and society by conveying scientific information to the public). The eighth element is the lecturer's skills in participating in providing services, community development, and training quality assessment activities, including 8 variables (e.g., skills in coordinating and organizing social activities). The assessment scale for training activities in developing professional skills for lecturers includes 17 observation variables used to assess the awareness of managers and lecturers about the necessity and implementation level of lecturers. The seventeen observation variables have four components. The first component is the objective of professional skills development training for lecturers, including 3 observation variables (e.g., meeting the standards of pedagogical skills of lecturers). The second component is the content of professional skills development training for lecturers, including 4 observation variables (e.g., training to improve foreign language skills for lecturers). The third component is the method of organizing professional skills development training for lecturers, which includes four observation variables (e.g., organizing direct training courses from leading experts). The fourth element is the form of organizing professional skills development training for lecturers, including 3 observed variables (e.g., organizing training in the direction of "waterfall" or "oil spill").

#### 3.4. Data Analysis

The study designs each observation variable using a Likert scale, converting responses into a 5-point scale that corresponds to different levels. The scale ranges from a minimum score of 1 to a maximum of 5. The scale is divided into 5 levels, and the distance between these levels is calculated as 0.8 using the formula [(max - min)/n]. This results in five distinct intervals: Level 1 represents scores from 1.0 to less than 1.8 (Very low), Level 2 from 1.8 to less than 2.6 (Low), Level 3 from 2.6 to less than 3.4 (Moderate), Level 4 from 3.4 to less than 4.2 (High), and Level 5 from 4.2 to 5.0 (Very high). These levels allow a nuanced interpretation of participants' responses, distinguishing between areas of strength and those needing improvement. To ensure internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each component of the skill and training assessment scales. A Cronbach's alpha value  $\geq 0.70$  was considered acceptable, based on established thresholds in educational and psychological research [38]. Values ranged from 0.72 to 0.91, indicating high reliability across most constructs. To ensure content validity, the survey items were developed based on established theoretical frameworks and validated instruments from previous studies, Biggs et al. [2] and Bong and Chen [4]. The questionnaire was also reviewed by a panel of five higher education experts in Vietnam for linguistic clarity, cultural relevance, and construct alignment. Furthermore, construct validity was supported through factor structure alignment with the theoretical components of professional skills (e.g., digital transformation, research writing, collaboration). This analysis helps ensure that we can accurately measure both lecturers' skills and the quality of professional development programs, allowing us to make informed suggestions for policies and practices.

#### 4. Results

# 4.1. Professional Skills of Lecturers

The results in Table 1 demonstrate that the teaching staff at universities in the Mekong Delta region have largely met the core professional standards required for higher education. Based on their average scores, the present study categorizes the eight professional skill components assessed into three distinct groups. The first group consists of professional skill components with average scores greater than 3.9, highlighting the areas where lecturers excel. These include the general skills of lecturers in professional activities at higher education institutions, which have an average score of 3.93 in self-assessment and 3.91 in manager assessment. Additionally, the skills of lecturers in providing services, engaging in community development, and participating in training quality assessment activities have the highest scores of 3.96 in self-assessment and 3.92 in manager assessment. This evidence suggests that lecturers are confident in their ability to contribute to their institutions' broader goals beyond teaching, including community engagement and service provision.

Professional skills of lecturers		Self-assessment of			Assessment of managers		
		lecturers					
		SD	α	Μ	SD	α	
1. General skills of lecturers in professional activities at higher education institutions	3.93	0.68	0.72	3.91	0.76	0.89	
2. University teaching skills of lecturers	3.82	0.76	0.90	3.69	0.81	0.80	
3. Scientific research skills and scientific report writing skills of lecturers	3.45	0.69	0.62	3.32	0.81	0.79	
4. Skills of lecturers in participating in professional activities and consulting and supporting learners	3.72	0.63	0.70	3.68	0.72	0.91	
5. Skills of lecturers in coordinating between schools and stakeholders in training	3.86	0.80	0.82	3.76	0.80	0.76	
6. Digital transformation skills of lecturers	3.48	0.80	0.89	3.38	0.80	0.90	
7. Innovation skills of lecturers	3.76	0.79	0.81	3.72	0.72	0.73	
8. Skills of lecturers in participating in providing services, community development and training quality assessment activities	3.96	0.71	0.82	3.92	0.86	0.89	

# Table 1.

Assessment results of the professional skills of lecturers.

Note: M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, α: Cronbach's alpha.

The second group includes components with average scores between 3.50 and 3.90. These encompass essential teaching skills, innovation skills, the ability to participate in professional activities and advise learners, and the coordination skills between schools and stakeholders. Lecturers' self-assessments and managers' evaluations align closely, with average scores ranging from 3.68 to 3.86, indicating that while these competencies are well-developed, there is still room for growth, particularly in the areas of teaching and innovation skills. For example, teaching skills received a self-assessment score of 3.82 and a slightly lower score of 3.69 from managers, pointing to a small gap in perceived effectiveness. The third group comprises the skill components with an average score below 3.50, indicating areas needing improvement. These include scientific research skills, report-writing skills, and digital transformation skills. Managers' self-assessment scores of 3.45 and 3.32 for scientific research skills and writing scientific reports indicate the lowest scores. Similarly, digital transformation skills scored 3.48 in self-assessment and 3.38 in manager evaluation, highlighting a critical area where training and development are necessary to meet the demands of modern educational environments. Specific skills, such as publishing research results, compiling textbooks and monographs, and determining standard output assessment indicators for subjects, receive the lowest ratings. These findings suggest that lecturers are confident in their teaching and community-related skills, but there is a significant need for further support in research and digital competencies to align with the evolving educational landscape. On the other hand, the skill component that received the highest scores was the ability to help others and improve the community. This shows that lecturers are good at contributing to societal and institutional development outside of their academic duties. For the first question, the results indicated that university lecturers in the Mekong Delta region demonstrate strong competencies in community engagement and general professional skills, but significant gaps remain in research and digital transformation, which are critical for meeting global academic standards.

# 4.2. Professional Skills Development Activities for Lecturers

The results in Table 2 reveal important insights regarding the assessment of professional skills development training for lecturers. With mean scores ranging from 3.69 to 3.98, the four parts that were evaluated, objectives, content, methods, and forms of organizing vocational skills development training are seen as very important by both managers and lecturers. This finding indicates that there is strong consensus on the importance of these components for the professional growth of lecturers. The objectives of vocational skills development training receive the highest necessity rating, with a mean score of 3.98, indicating that clearly defined goals play a critical role in guiding effective training programs. Additionally, the relatively high Cronbach's alpha values (ranging from 0.81 to 0.90) suggest that the responses are consistent and reliable.

# Table 2.

Assessment results of professional skills development activities for lecturers.

Components	L	evel of nec	essity	Level of implementation			
	М	SD	α	Μ	SD	α	
1.Objectives of vocational skills development training for lecturers	3.98	0.62	0.90	3.70	0.63	0.86	
2. Contents of vocational skills development training for lecturers	3.78	0.72	0.86	3.58	0.80	0.90	
3. Methods of organizing vocational skills development training for lecturers	3.69	0.81	0.86	3.68	0.72	0.82	
4. Forms of organizing professional skills development training for lecturers	3.88	0.76	0.81	3.51	0.82	0.86	

Note: M: Mean, SD: Standard deviation, α: Cronbach's alpha.

However, the implementation of these components appears to lag slightly behind their perceived necessity. The mean scores for the implementation level range from 3.50 to 3.70, with the lowest score (3.51) attributed to the forms of organizing professional skills development training. This gap between necessity and implementation, although not drastic, highlights potential areas for improvement in the actual execution of the training programs. For instance, although the objectives receive high ratings, their implementation, with a mean score of 3.70, indicates that there is potential for improvement in achieving these goals in practice. In summary, while the necessity of professional skills development for lecturers is well recognized, the data suggest that more focus is needed on improving the methods and forms of implementation to ensure that the training programs meet the identified needs and are carried out effectively. For the second question, the results showed that professional skills development activities should be implemented through contextually relevant, interactive, and outcome-focused training programs that align with Vietnam's education reform and global integration goals while bridging the gap between perceived importance and practical execution.

# **5.** Discussion and Implications

#### 5.1. Discussion

The current status of professional skills among university lecturers in the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam suggests that the teaching staff have largely met the core professional standards, with varying degrees of proficiency across different skill components. The results of this study confirm that university teachers in the Mekong Delta region have mostly reached basic professional skills, especially in community involvement and service to their institutions, supporting earlier research that points out how important these areas are in academic jobs [39, 40]. These strengths align with global trends highlighting the value of university-society collaboration and service-learning frameworks [19, 20]. Such alignment is critical for institutions aiming to fulfill not only academic functions but also their civic and developmental responsibilities. Moreover, strong performance in these areas underscores the lecturers' capacity to serve as institutional ambassadors and social change agents, which are increasingly emphasized in both local and international higher education policy frameworks [41].

However, significant gaps in scientific research and digital transformation skills were found, showing worries noted in both local [24, 42] and international studies, Bong and Chen [4], and Baumann and Leišytė [23]. These deficiencies limit lecturers' ability to contribute to scholarly knowledge production and effectively integrate educational technologies into pedagogy. This is particularly problematic in the context of global academic competitiveness, where institutions are increasingly evaluated based on research output and digital learning capabilities. Scholars like [11] argue that without digital competence, faculty members struggle to create engaging, inclusive, and future-ready learning environments. Similarly, Camacho et al. [22] emphasize the role of ICT proficiency in ensuring instructional resilience during disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The implementation gap between the perceived necessity and actual delivery of training programs is similarly concerning. While lecturers and managers acknowledge the importance of clear objectives and updated training content, they consistently rate the execution especially training formats like peer mentoring and blended learning as underdeveloped [10, 36]. This supports [43] observation that many programs remain overly theoretical and lack the hands-on design required for practical learning. Theoretical dominance and a lack of applied practice reduce the utility of training sessions and fail to engage adult learners, who benefit most from contextually rich, problem-based learning strategies. Contributing to this implementation gap are institutional barriers such as inadequate funding, resistance to pedagogical change, and hierarchical decision-making structures that do not reflect the diverse needs of faculty [44, 45].

Additionally, the small differences between how teachers rate their own teaching skills and how managers rate them indicate that some faculty might think they are better at teaching than they really are or view teaching effectiveness in a more old-fashioned way [17, 46]. This highlights the need for more robust and multi-source evaluation mechanisms, including student feedback, peer reviews, and performance-based teaching portfolios. Objective assessment systems provide developmental feedback and reinforce reflective practice, an essential skill for continuous pedagogical improvement.

Encouraging self-awareness and critical reflection among lecturers would also facilitate better alignment between perceived strengths and actual instructional impact, leading to more targeted and effective professional development pathways.

#### 5.2. Implications

Professional development programs for university lecturers must address their diverse backgrounds and needs. To support Vietnam's education reform and internationalization goals, professional development initiatives must shift from generic, one-size-fits-all training to customized, demand-driven approaches that address actual skill gaps. For example, the enhancement of research competencies must include modules on grant writing, peer-reviewed publishing, and interdisciplinary collaboration skills critical for improving academic output and global visibility [16, 47, 48]. This aligns with findings by Superi and Naqshbandi [18] who emphasize that lecturer competencies are closely tied to student academic performance, reinforcing the need for comprehensive training that enhances both instructional and scholarly effectiveness. Sharma [49] also supports this viewpoint by proposing integrated models for educational leadership development, including academic writing and project management, as central to faculty competence.

In parallel, digital skills training must go beyond basic ICT tools to include advanced digital pedagogy, inclusive teaching practices, and data-driven decision-making [4, 11]. These skills are increasingly non-negotiable as higher education institutions move toward hybrid and online learning environments. As Camacho et al. [22] note, digital competency is now a core component of instructional quality, particularly in post-pandemic contexts. Investing in things like better technology, support, and flexible training options will be crucial for helping different faculty members and making it easier for everyone to access resources. Herawati [36] underscores the importance of integrating learning management systems (LMS) and digital accessibility frameworks into faculty development, which enhances inclusivity and efficiency in teaching.

At a practical level, universities should promote collaborative learning communities and faculty mentoring systems to foster reflective, peer-based learning environments that reinforce training outcomes [14, 29, 50, 51]. Such initiatives cultivate professional identity and shared ownership of pedagogical practices. Kiran et al. [52] also found that sustained interaction through peer feedback and community-based development strengthens the long-term effectiveness of faculty training programs. Moreover, embedding faculty learning within collaborative structures helps reduce isolation and encourages innovation through knowledge exchange. Furthermore, foreign language development and international exchange programs can serve as critical levers for enabling global academic integration [53-55]. This approach is particularly important in improving access to international research publications and expanding collaborative networks. Faculty who are proficient in academic English are better equipped to contribute to global knowledge production and engage with international standards and accreditation processes [30].

These results indicate that university lecturers in the Mekong Delta are skilled in traditional teaching and service roles, but to improve research and digital involvement, they need flexible, evidence-based, and inclusive training programs that match Vietnam's national goals and global academic standards. Such frameworks must be tightly aligned with Vietnam's national strategies and global academic standards, ensuring that faculty not only meet current expectations but are also prepared to lead innovation in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

# 6. Conclusion

The quality of a university's education is intrinsically linked to the professional competencies of its lecturers, who facilitate student learning and shape institutional credibility, innovation, and alignment with global standards. This study confirmed that while university lecturers in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region demonstrate strong performance in general professional and community engagement skills, significant skill gaps persist in areas such as scientific research, digital transformation, and academic writing. These deficits hinder progress toward national educational reform goals and global academic integration.

To support ongoing development, institutions must embrace a multi-dimensional strategy that emphasizes personalized, practical, and contextually relevant training. This strategy includes fostering a culture of reflective practice, incentivizing participation in research, and strengthening digital capabilities. The establishment of structured mentorship programs, collaborative research networks, and investments in modern teaching infrastructure can help bridge the existing competency gaps. Furthermore, universities must prioritize lifelong learning as a core value by empowering lecturers with the tools, autonomy, and institutional support needed to evolve alongside pedagogical and technological advances.

Beyond the local context, the study's findings have broader implications for faculty development in emerging higher education systems. It underscores the importance of aligning training programs with evolving academic expectations, industry demands, and international benchmarks. By doing so, universities not only improve internal quality assurance but also enhance their global competitiveness and societal contributions. While the study provides critical insights, its limitations, such as reliance on convenience sampling, self-reported data, and an exclusively quantitative approach suggest directions for future research. Expanding to a nationally representative sample, integrating qualitative data collection, and applying longitudinal methods would provide a more comprehensive understanding of lecturers' developmental trajectories. Additionally, future studies could explore the effectiveness of specific training models, institutional policies, and crossnational comparisons to generate more actionable recommendations for policy and practice.

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