

# Lecturer Professional Development Strategies in a Higher Education Institution in Ha Tinh Province at a Time of Educational Reforms

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in enhancing student achievement and school improvement. It is a process which starts during lecturer training at tertiary education institutions and extends to include job-embedded and collaborative professional learning opportunities for lecturers at their institutions. Many strategies for lecturer professional development have been proposed in the literature on higher education. This qualitative case study investigation sought to identify various typical strategies employed to promote lecturer professional development at Ha Tinh University in Central Vietnam. Ten strategies were identified, some of which were university-based, while others were offered externally. These strategies are described within the context of significant reforms being implemented in the higher education sector in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Ha Tinh University, higher education, lecturer professional development, professional development strategies, Vietnam.

**Abstract.** Lecturer professional development (LPD) plays a significant role

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## 1. Introduction

Four trends to emerge over the past decade in the global literature on lecturer professional development are as follows. First, the role of lecturer professional development (herein after referred as LPD) has

been recognized to be at least as important as pre-service lecturer training in terms of its impact on the quality of teaching [Lieberman, Pointer Mace, 2008]. Second, a traditional view of lecturer professional development, involving the provision of in-service workshops and certificate/degree upgrading programs, has been displaced by more school-based learning strategies [Harris, Jones 2019; Opfer, Pedder 2011; Webster-Wright 2009]. Third, lecturer professional development is now taking place more in the context of learning communities [Little 2012]. Finally, lecturer professional development has come to occupy a central place in sustainable educational development strategies [Fullan 2011; Lieberman, Pointer Mace 2008].

The context for the present investigation is Ha Tinh University in central Vietnam where various strategies have been implemented more effectively with a view to providing to LDP. The research question is: “what are the strategies of lecturer professional development being implemented in Ha Tinh University at a time when universities in Vietnam are being encouraged to engage in significant reforms intended to achieve improvements in quality?”

The investigation documented here required the implementation of a qualitative research design whereby experiences with lecturer professional development of a cross-section of lecturers and academic managers at the University with lecturer professional development were analyzed. Current practices were also directly observed, and related policy documents were examined. The investigation sought principally to generate insights that might inform policy and practices more widely in Vietnam’s higher education sector in Vietnam. The investigation also provided an opportunity to reflect critically on the global literature about lecturer professional development.

## **2. Previous Research**

The emphasis over recent years in research on lecturer professional development has shifted more in the direction of forms of professional development that are multi-faceted and job-embedded [Harris, Jones 2019; Vescio, Ross, Adams 2008; Webster-Wright 2009]. Lecturer professional development is now regarded as a continuous process that begins during pre-service lecturer training and continues throughout an academic career [Harris, Jones, 2019; Little 2012]. It is an ongoing process whereby lecturers acquire new subject knowledge and teaching method skills [Hallinger, Liu 2016; Opfer, Pedder 2011].

Two common formats for lecturer professional development are university-based and externally-based. University-based programs typically involve site-specific workshops and observations of lecturing by colleagues. Externally-based programs are typically provided from outside a school, often involving participation in external workshops, training courses and often also conducted within the context of degree/certificate upgrading. Reference is also made in the literature to

self-direct forms of lecturer professional development, where individual lecturers seek to enhance their professional skills by self-instruction or through engagement in team-based teaching activities. Across all formats, lecturer professional development may be a process undertaken voluntarily, or it may be a process mandated by a head of department, a rector or even a national regulatory authority.

The literature on lecture professional development is diverse. Hallinger and Liu [2016], and Timperley [2011] report on opportunities for lecturer professional development in the workplace [Hallinger, Liu, 2016; Timperley, 2011]. Little [2012], Timperley [2011] and Webster-Wright (2009) report on professional development programs involving lecturer research groups, observations of other lecturers, and mentoring and coaching. Other scholars have reported on the value of informal interactions in collaborative shared assessment and forms of informal communication [Little 2012; Somprach, Tang, Popoonsak 2016]. Workplace norms may shape lecturer collaboration and motivation for professional development [Rosenholtz 1989; Tran, Hallinger, Truong 2018; Tran et al. 2020]. Researchers from several East Asian countries, including China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand, have also mentioned social, cultural and political influences on lecturers' attitudes and actions regarding professional development. Confucian norms, which are evident in many East Asian nations, may also prompt lecturers to believe in the value of continuous learning. In Vietnamese culture, for example, a good or perfect person is not only professionally competent but also displays moral qualities that are in harmony with a Confucian ideal of commitment to more learning [Borton 2000; Dalton et al. 2005; Qian, Walker 2013; Wang 2016]. A 'good lecturer' is, therefore, one who seeks further development through learning, not only with respect to moral qualities (*Duc*) but also with respect to subject knowledge and teaching skills (*Tai*) [Nguyen 2003; Tran, Nguyen 2019].

### **3. Design and Method**

A qualitative case study research design [Yin 2014] was used for this investigation as a basis for outlining different TPD strategies in Ha Tinh University in Central Vietnam (hereinafter referred to as the University). Qualitative research focuses on and tries to make sense of phenomena in natural and specific situations and/or settings to understand through looking closely at people's actions, words and records [Denzin, Lincoln 2000; Patton 2015]. This qualitative case study design is to make this study exploratory-explanatory [Yin 2014]. Trustworthiness for the study data collection is ensured by the triangulation of data sources including the interview with the Rector, questionnaires with the lecturers, observations and document analysis, the credibility (member checks with the confirmation of interview contents collected with the Rector) and the audit trail, as recommended by Patton

[2015]. We now report on the sample selection, methods of data collection and methods of data analysis for the investigation.

The investigation required purposeful sampling designed to yield “information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” [Patton 2015: 169]. The University was selected for its importance within Ha Tinh Province in terms of its achievements. The Rector of the University was identified as being an important person to interview. The Rector was important also because the permission was required to distribute questionnaires to lecturers.

Having collected many awards over a long period of time, the University has maintained a continuing focus on improving the quality of its teaching staff. It has 360 staff (220 lecturers) and 5,000 students. According to the Rector, LPD is considered an integral part of the University’s success.

Data resulted from semi-structured interviews with the Rector, open-ended questionnaires distributed to lecturers, and direct observations of LPD strategies at the University. Semi-structured interviews [Patton 2015] sought to obtain information about the Rector’s perspectives and leadership practices, and about the professional learning strategies organized for lecturers. Lecturers’ perspectives were expressed in response to an open-ended questionnaire that focused on their needs and motivations as well as the professional development practices applied at the University. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed at faculty meetings, of which 165 were returned (an 82.5% response rate). To obtain further detail, and to check on what had been reported by the Rector and the lecturers, we also observed LPD strategies over a three-month period. These observations provided additional insights and they contributed to the process of triangulation as a means of assuring the credibility of the findings reported [Patton 2015].

We employed ‘within-case analysis’ [Patton 2015; Yin 2014] for this investigation. First, the data were coded according to the different data sources. Then the complete data set was analyzed with a specific focus on LPD strategies employed at the University. Open coding and axial coding were adopted to generate the list of strategies utilised there.

**4. Findings** Ten professional development strategies for LPD at the University were identified. These may be classified as either external or university-based strategies.

**4.1. External Strategies** This strategy was considered by Thay Nguyen—the Rector to be effective and important. Lecturers also commented on the significance of having Master of Arts (MA) or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees.  
4.1.1. Degree Upgrading According to the University’s statistics, 80% of lecturers held MA or PhD degrees (62 PhD holders and 100 MA holders). Twenty-three lec-

turers were doing a PhD (five at overseas universities) and 40 lecturers were doing MA programs.

Many lecturers have spent two or three years full-time or part-time doing courses in universities in Ha Noi capital or Hue city. They faced many difficulties, especially financial matters, in order to gain MA or PhD qualifications. Several lecturers recalled their experiences in their questionnaires:

...Two-year MA full-time studying at Ha Noi National University involves memorable experiences both in terms of advantages and difficulties. In order to upgrade my knowledge for the sake of my job, my fame, and the profession requirements for the future, I faced many obstacles including finance, time, and so on. Being married with two children and staying in the University staff's hostel, my wife and I had to save every cent just to survive. My monthly salary was 4500 000 VND [equivalent 180 USD], and my wife's was 3500 000 VND too. My salary was just enough for my very modest expenditure in Ha Noi. Thus, I restricted home visits and tried to do tutoring for some children for rich families in Ha Noi. My wife, apart from being busy with taking care of the children and the whole family when I was away, had to have extra teaching periods to earn some more money. I estimate the total cost for my MA was about 100 million VND. I am now surprised that how we could suffer such difficulties and overcome them. Thus, I really appreciate my wife's devotion as a Vietnamese woman to help me succeed in my studying... (T9).

Being a Vietnamese woman studying and staying far from my husband and my one-year old daughter for two years' time was quite hard. Beside the difficulty in finance, missing my husband and especially my little daughter was a very tough. I cried many nights because I missed them too much and I wanted to cancel my course. But my husband and family's encouragement, together with my self-responsibility, helped me have more strength. I remember once,... when I came back to our room in the staff's hostel from Ha Noi to visit my husband and daughter, standing at the window and looking through it, I saw my husband and my daughter sleeping on the floor with a lot of toys around. Tears started to come out on my face with a mixture of emotions. I knew that without a woman's hand in a family, everything seemed to be disordered and messy. I felt guilty for that. However, at last I completed my MA course with a distinction grade. I'm doing a PhD now in Hanoi too, but not as hard as the time of doing my MA, as just only the time devoted to research and traveling to Hanoi and finance, not like the time when doing an MA. (T18)

The 4 year long PhD course in New Zealand was really hard for me and my family because of many challenges: living far from home with decent scholarships from my government so I could not bring my wife and 3 three children here; struggling with the language barriers and new academic learning that took a lot of my time and energy. I really highly appreciate my wife’s sacrifice when I was away for such a long period of time. (T12)

The Rector explained that he has tried to encourage lecturers to upgrade their degrees and had also supported lecturers in spiritual and material ways. Because of lack of PhD holders for the University, he encouraged his staff to learn English to get a scholarship doing PhD or MA abroad that will benefit the staff and the University more. He said that lecturers who wanted to upgrade their degrees had to register, and those who were younger would have priority. Sometimes, too many lecturers wanted to study at the same time and there were not enough lecturers to replace them. Then, they had to take turns to study. Thay Nguyen the Rector elaborated:

Lecturers in departments with few PhD holders will have priority. Moreover, those lecturers register at the department and the department then sets up the list of registered lecturers for us to decide who will go first. We try to help those lecturers to have a chance to upgrade their degrees by meeting all policies stipulated by the State, MOET and the province leaders. They still maintain the same salaries and have travel costs and extra support from the province. At the final presentation of the thesis, a delegation including me, or a deputy-rector and several lecturers attend that presentation meeting to give the presenters flowers and encouragement.

Lecturers said that one of the most difficult problems they faced when studying is finance. Despite receiving support from the University and the Province, lecturers needed a great deal of money to complete an MA or PhD course at a university in Vietnam. Many lecturers really wanted to upgrade their qualifications, but they could not overcome the obstacles of finance and family commitments. One lecturer wrote, “I intended to do PhD course, but I have not saved enough money for the course. Beside support from the University and the Province, in order to complete the course, I need an amount of about 250 million VND” (T14).

Lecturers said they appreciated the spiritual and financial support received from Thay Nguyen as the Rector. Statements such as “the Rector always encourages us to upgrade our degrees” (T28), “He appreciates lecturers’ efforts in overcoming difficulties to study” (T24), “Our Rector tries to create mechanisms and conditions for us to take

long-term courses” (T125), can be found in the lecturers’ responses to the questionnaire.

#### 4.1.2. Conferences, Workshops, Training Courses and Seminars

Thay Nguyen the Rector explained that this was a University, so professionalism-related issues were mainly and directly dependent on Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Thus, the University lecturers often participated in conferences, workshops, training courses and seminars, organized by MOET or other universities/organizations. Workshops and conferences were regularly organized for lecturers from different subjects. Thay Nguyen said that in recent years, the topics for those workshops centred on educational reform, including changes in education objectives, textbook replacement, and teaching method reform. Because this is a University in which education training is a significant part, teacher educators had to master all of these matters in order to be able to train their students more effectively. Thus, the Rector and deputy rectors paid more attention to these matters. Currently many educational reforms were being implemented by MOET for developments and improvements and a lot of conferences and workshops with relevant issues were held. The Rector explained that he paid attention to these conferences/workshops focussing on educational reforms and assigned lecturers to attend. Since 2010, the dean or vice-dean of each department has attended these workshops. After the workshop (often one-week duration), those lecturers who attended were responsible for sharing the knowledge with other lecturers in their departments through professional meetings or seminars. One lecturer of English wrote, “Our Dean presented many new issues related to educational reform. These presentations have helped us learn more about the details of the reforms. We can use some of that knowledge to teach our students, especially the communicative methods” (T19). In terms of conferences, lecturers were encouraged to send their articles for review, publication in the conference proceedings or presentation, and they are provided finance and time for those realistic strategies. After a conference, participants could share the books or materials with their colleagues in the department.

These professional learning strategies were sponsored externally by universities or by provincial offices. In all cases, the workshops and short courses offered curricula that were vetted, pre-approved, and eligible for credits for use by lecturers to validate their continued certification. Participation could be voluntary, suggested (e. g., by the Dean or the Rector), or mandatory (e. g., training courses required by the MOET). In many cases, however, these courses were regarded as falling short of lecturers’ expectations. Knowledge acquired was “sometimes abstract, unrealistic and not appropriate for use in our classrooms” (T46).

4.1.3. Visits to Other Universities According to the Rector, because this University is a new one, there are not many leading and experienced lecturers at the University level, especially “*PhD holders with much experience*”. Thus, many visits to other universities were organized. The Rector explained:

We can divide university visits into two forms. The first is a delegation of leaders or lecturers. The delegation often consists of around 5 representative members, from the management board and different departments. Each delegation visits other reputed universities to learn many things from them including how to manage the University, the departments, the staff and the students well, how to improve teaching, learning, research and so on... The second form is individual lecturer visit or groups of individual lecturers. This policy is clearly outlined and says that lecturers can visit several universities or institutes if they find those visits very useful for their teaching or research. However, before being approved by me, those lecturers have to submit a statement of purpose which states detailed objectives of the visit, the duration, and how they could disseminate the learnt issues to their colleagues. After the approval is given, they get some cash in advance for travel and accommodation costs.

Several lecturers wrote about such visits. They said they could learn many things from their colleagues after their visits. Many lecturers included specific statements such as “getting some textbooks or curriculum or research experience from those universities as useful references for us” (T32), “...learn[ing] how to organize group-learning and clubs for students” (T69), or “...their department library management and use is very effective and we should learn” (T57), or “learning several experiences and motivation for conducting research and article publication process” (T65). Lecturers generally appreciated their Rector’s support in the use of this strategy as it helped them learn more from their counterparts in other universities.

## **5. University-Based Professional Learning Strategies**

### **5.1. Classroom Observations of Other Lecturers**

This strategy was widely used at the University. Each lecturer was obliged to observe at least one other lesson every two—four weeks. Observation notes were written in a notebook that was checked by the section leaders or department leaders or the Academic Affairs Department at the end of a semester or an academic year. According to the Rector, observation was particularly promoted and encouraged on several special occasions such as ‘International Women’s Day’, ‘Vietnamese Lecturers’ Day’, and so on. After observation, discussions were encouraged.

Nevertheless, according to lecturers, this was not very useful because there were too many specific subjects, even in one department, and many specialisations even within the one subject. Thus, observers could not discuss the content of observed lessons in detail. In-



stead, they often focused on the teaching method. These reasons could partly explain why “*observation is not very popular in this University*”. Most questionnaires mentioned the ineffectiveness of these observations. It appeared that observation was not given enough attention by either the management board or the lecturers. One female lecturer with 20 years of teaching wrote, “In general, we can learn from one another after observations. However, because we often teach different sub-subjects, so we could learn less about the subject knowledge, but more about teaching methodology” (T10). Similar statements were found in another nine lecturers’ questionnaires.

As part of this investigation, eight lessons from four departments (two from each department) were observed. Field-notes confirmed the lecturers’ comments: “Lecturers seemed to discuss a lot about teaching methodology including timing, lecturer’s behaviours toward his/her students, classroom management, and so on... Only lecturers of the same subject voiced opinions on the content of the lesson and the subject knowledge” (Field-notes, 7 March, 2019).

As mentioned above, there are many subjects and specialisations in a department. Take the Nature department as an example. There are the following main subjects: Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Informatics, and Biology. Each subject is also divided into many sub-subjects. Sub-subjects of Maths can be advanced algebra, geometry, and many others. Each lecturer is in charge of one or two sub-subjects as their major specialization. Thus, it is difficult to contribute their ideas in the discussion phase (after observation) in terms of subject knowledge. Learning from observations seems to be better in the English department. Although each lecturer is assigned to teach several subjects such as phonetics, methodology, English or American literature and culture, grammar, and four skills, each lecturer can have opinions on the subjects that are not his/her majors. This is because a lecturer of English is trained in those subjects at university: “I am not very good at every sub-subject, like the ones who are specialized in it. However, I can have some ideas on observed lessons such as intonation, structures, methods, and so on” (T43).

## 5.2. Academic Professional Meetings

Regulations dictate that departmental academic professional meetings occur twice a month. “This strategy is often associated with seminars at the department level” (Thay Nguyen the Rector). According to Thay Nguyen the Rector, at the beginning of the academic year, lecturers of each department decided topics for seminars at the department level. Each lecturer could register to host a topic/topics. A list of topics was then scheduled. A copy was sent to the department management board and other departments in case anyone else wanted to participate. Each lecturer also got a copy to prepare ideas for the seminars. Many lecturers said they found this strategy useful because they could choose a topic, prepare and open their presentation for discussion, and get feedback from other colleagues.

During academic professional meetings, lecturers, who had recently learnt something new and interesting from workshops organized by MOET, other conferences or universities, or even from materials they have read, can host presentations. However, several lecturers doubted the effectiveness of those meetings. One lecturer wrote: “Overall, I find academic professional meetings useful and necessary for lecturers. However, some topics are not very realistic and interesting because they are not prepared well, and some lecturers do not actively and enthusiastically participate in discussions. They are sometimes formal” (T6). According to Thay Nguyen the Rector, the University encouraged such seminars. He elaborated:

If any management board member is free, we also take part in those seminars. It is both a way of supervision and a way of learning for us. We can see how effective it is and how well they are doing in order to draw some experiences for the future. Big seminars are even supported financially.

### **5.3. A Coaching-Mentoring Strategy**

This was used rather effectively in this University. The procedures of assigning an experienced lecturer for a novice lecturer were as follows: When a novice lecturer started working at this University, s/he was assigned an experienced lecturer as a mentor; The novice could ask the experienced lecturer about lesson plans, academic and teaching issues, or about university procedures and practices. Lecturers appeared generally to be ready and eager to exchange experiences and share their knowledge with one another when they had an opportunity.

Not only novice lecturers but also mentors referred to advantages of the mentoring process. Experienced and older lecturers’ writings reflected this. One lecturer with 24 years of teaching experience noted, “When guiding and supporting young lecturers, I can also improve. I have had to find more materials to read and I have learnt several good ideas from novice lecturers as well” (T83). Coaching between lecturers was encouraged, according to Thay Nguyen. He said, “Exchanging ideas on professional issues between lecturers of different teaching experience is always encouraged... Interactions occurring during professional meetings, observations, seminars indicate this view”. Most lecturers indicated the advantages of coaching. This was found in seven questionnaires. One lecturer wrote, “No one is perfect. Thus, we have to learn from one another by discussing and exchanging opinions on professional matters” (T82). Observation also revealed evidence of the exchanging of ideas between lecturers at the University.

### **5.4. Seminars / Conferences at the University level and Speeches from Distinguished People**

Seminars were organized every six weeks, according to Thay Nguyen, the Rector. Based on the curriculum, the objectives of the academic year, requirements of MOET, representatives from the departments and the management board discussed and selected the topics for seminars. According to him, after topics are settled, a copy of the list

of topics was sent to all staff to give feedback, and prepare their ideas or presentations for the seminars: “We assign several experienced lecturers for presentations. Other lecturers are encouraged to have their presentations at the seminars. As usual, ten days before the seminar, lecturers have to send their proposals and estimated time for their presentations to the seminar organization board for approval”. Thay Nguyen the Rector also said that, in order to change the format of seminars, famous and prestigious scientists or professors from other universities are often invited to give speeches. Lecturers are encouraged to attend such speeches and to prepare questions to ask those speakers. University level conferences or department level conferences are required to organize for great chance for lecturers to share experiences of teaching and research.

Lecturers generally acknowledged the significance of these events. A lecturer wrote,

At the University, I find these seminars/conferences necessary for my teaching and research. Seminars and conferences provide us with a good chance to exchange viewpoints and experiences. I appreciate the series of seminars closely connected to the changes of the educational reforms...It is interesting to have opportunities to hear famous scientists' speeches. (T7)

According to Thay Nguyen the Rector, departments would invite scientists to give speeches to the department staff. The University was in charge of paying the costs of those visits. The Rector's support in this strategy was recognized by many lecturers. About 150 lecturers indicated the Rector's or Deputy Rectors' regular presence at the seminars and their involvement in the questioning or discussing: “I often see the Rector or his deputy rectors in the seminars, especially at the University level. He pays attention to presentations, takes notes, and asks many questions” (T9).

5.5. Scientific Studies/  
Publications/Experience  
Initiatives

Thay Nguyen the Rector and lecturers all considered these very important at the tertiary education level. At least, a yearly volume of 180 hours of research work for each teaching staff needs to be completed. Those hours are accumulated from scientific studies, published articles on journals or conferences, books and so on. According to the Rector, because the stipulated teaching hours for University lecturers are eight teaching hours per week, more time should be spent on research and self-learning. Thay Nguyen described the procedures followed for lecturers' scientific studies. First, at the beginning of the academic year (15 August), lecturers registered the research proposal. Then, a list of topics was set up and sent to the University's Education Council. After that, departmental lecturers presented their research proposals at a departmental/division meeting. Comments and questions around the studies were raised for lecturer researchers to

answer. Next, in April of the following year, a research presentation seminar is organized at each division/department. Other divisions/departments were noticed of these meetings and asked to attend. An invitation was also sent to the Education Council staff to come. Lecturers took turns to present their studies. Presenters had to answer other participants' questions and get feedback from them. At the end of that meeting, based on set criteria, the department staff graded others' studies by anonymous votes. The grades were named department, University, Provincial, and MOET levels. Then, lecturers with suggested grades from the University level had to hand in their research to the University's Education Council for assessment and grading. Suggested grades at the Provincial and MOET level were sent to the Provincial and MOET for assessment and grading. Thay Nguyen said that he wanted lecturers to pay more attention to this strategy. Monetary rewards were given to lecturers with high grades. Another significant way to enhance lecturers' research competency was to require them to publish on internationally-recognised journals, especially ISI/Scopus-indexed ones or national journals or important conferences. Thay Nguyen elaborated: “we understand that ISI/Scopus-indexed journals have important impact on university ranking and reputation as well as for lecturers to be awarded titles of professors/associate professors, we encourage and even offer financial reward as a kind of support, only 10 million VND for any authors as the first author for the paper on ISI/Scopus journals, not like other big universities tens of million VND”

In general, lecturers understood the significance of this strategy and the requirements of the University. However, they also found it difficult to have yearly scientific studies. Some lecturers mentioned the difficulty in selecting an interesting and helpful topic for their research. Moreover, according to them, time, money, and a great deal of energy were required to complete a good study. One lecturer wrote, “I have had many studies recognized for many years. Although the University tries to support and encourage us with rewards, I have to spend much of my own money to conduct a good quality study. Moreover, it is not easy to choose a new yearly topic...” (T100). “Although the articles on ISI/Scopus are very significant, it is very hard for lecturers like us to publish one for some reasons: first is the English language barrier; second is the references; third is that our ways of research doing is outdated, not Western style. These prevent us from having publications on famous international journals” (T35). Our own experience supports these comments.

In the Rector's view, this activity was a “form of self-learning that stimulated the lecturers' continued interest in the job. Because all lecturers take on these projects annually and share their results with each other, there is collective improvement for the University. Publications on internationally-recognised journals such as ISI/Scopus ones are highly appreciated and encouraged for lecturers” (Thay Nguyen the Rector).

### 5.6. Self-Directed Learning

Beside the above shared professional development strategies, Thay Nguyen the Rector and lecturers acknowledged the importance of lecturers' self-learning. Thay Nguyen maintained he tried to make his lecturers more aware of the significance of self-learning and more responsible for that activity. He emphasized, "Lecturers should be aware of the contributions of self-learning and life-long learning to their work in this University. They must set an example of life-long learning to their students who are future lecturers. I myself set a good example to my lecturers by taking part in professional development strategies regularly".

According to the Rector, in order to supervise and check the effectiveness of this activity, several solutions were applied. First was checking the lecturers' 'accumulative professional knowledge notebook'. Also, at the beginning of the school year, lecturers were required to register an academic area which they will focus on. These areas included a foreign language, informatics, research training courses and so on. At the end of the school year in April or May, lecturers reported their progress and the results of their learning to other lecturers at a department meeting. Another solution was to encourage lecturers to write articles for the University's Journal of Sciences, published every three months by the University. The Journal of Sciences consisted of the University lecturers' writings or studies and others from different universities. Thay Nguyen the Rector noted that lecturers were made aware that the number of their writings contributed to their final grades. He explained, "These procedures are applied in order to make lecturers become more responsible for self-learning. They are a requirement and provide motivation for lecturers to continually read and learn... These are operating rather well and have brought certain results for lecturers' improvement". These strategies were involved in the Rector's or his deputy rectors' supervision and checking that indicated clearly his autocratic leadership style.

The lecturers generally acknowledged their Rector's focus on these strategies. Several lecturers (five) commented on this strategy. One wrote,

The Rector/deputies have put in place procedures to make us pay more attention to self-learning. Because some lecturers have to do 'left-handed jobs' to earn more money to support their families or are busy dealing with their families' matters, so that they are more or less lazy or do not spend much time on self-learning".

Although all lecturers were conscious of the importance of self-study, many lecturers found it difficult to find time. The female lecturers, in particular, were busy caring for their families. Thus, the extent of self-study among lecturers seemed highly variable.

### 5.7. 'Good Lecturer' Recognition Titles

'Good lecturer' recognition titles were also targeted by most lecturers as in other Vietnamese typical public schools. There were differ-

ent 'good lecturer' levels in this University: the department (Lao dong tien tien), the University (Chien sy thi dua co so), and the Provincial/MOET level (Chien sy thi dua cap Tinh/Bo). At the end of the semester and the academic year, at department meetings, lecturers, based on registered titles and each lecturer's achievements including scientific studies, voted anonymously for other lecturers' titles. Then, the list of lecturers' titles was sent to the University's Education Council to examine and approve. Those titles are regarded as motivation and foundations for having promotion or salary raise and so on.

**6. Discussion** This investigation explored and explained different strategies used in Ha Tinh University to support the professional development of its lecturers to meet the increasing demand of educational reforms, especially higher education reforms. What also became apparent during the time of the investigation was the different nature of these strategies. In principle, different strategies were favoured by different lecturers based on their gender, competency, age, experience, and family situations. Thus, Thay Nguyen the Rector was quite explicit about the need to apply different strategies to motivate different types of lecturers take part in lecturer professional development.

Generally, university-based strategies were more popular than external learning ones for lecturers in Ha Tinh University. Furthermore, lecturers appeared to engage in external strategies such as Degree Upgrading, visits to other universities and Conferences/seminars for different reasons than the university-based strategies. Lecturers participated in those strategies to achieve qualifications and improve their professional identity and the self. 'Vietnamese thinking' cultural aspect regards a higher qualification, or 'title' as visible evidence of its holder's capacities and reputation. Hence, the qualification becomes a tangible reward and reputation in the eyes of the University, the Department, the community, teaching job and the colleagues [Tran et al. 2020]. Fullan [2011] has highlighted the benefits of 'positive pressure' as a positive sign of motivation for professional learning and change towards improvements. However, the interview suggested that 'positive' is in the mind of the Rector as a leader. It was obvious that some lecturers had taken part in the above strategies for the 'face' and compulsory requirement of the University and regulations rather than for the benefits of their improved teaching and research.

University-based strategies, on the other hand, appeared to focus more on offering realistic professional knowledge and teaching/research skills for lecturers. Whether mandatory or voluntary, the Rector/Department boards or lecturers themselves initiated, those strategies such as Classroom Observations, Coaching-Mentoring, Academic Professional Meetings, Seminars, Yearly scientific studies/publications/experience initiatives and Self-learning offered an ongoing foundation for LPD strategies. From the Rector's perspective,

that foundation ensured that all lecturers would take part in continued LPD that benefitted both the University and the lecturers themselves. Hence, all lecturers participated in school-based strategies including Academic Professional Meetings, Classroom Observations, and University level conferences/Seminars. However, within the university-wide expectations, lecturers had the choice of where to focus their professional development. For example, during their early years, lecturers might spend their learning time to Degree Upgrading, Classroom Observation, and Coaching-Mentoring strategies. On the contrary, more experienced lecturers might spend more time to leading staff Seminars, Mentoring new lecturers, Good Lecturer Recognition Titles, Yearly scientific studies/publications/experience initiatives, and Self-learning. These different ways to adult learning reflect a mature and effective approach to adult professional learning and improvements.

Our investigation could identify if localised aspects that characterized LPD in this Vietnamese Higher Education Institution were available or not. For instance, researchers have identified 'lecturer research groups' as a common feature of LPD in Chinese schools [Paine, Fang, 2006], we would conclude that 'Good Lecturer' Recognition Titles, Academic Professional Meetings, and Yearly scientific studies/publications/experienced initiatives are 'localised practices' here at the University. These LPD strategies are 'localised' in the meaning that they seem to reflect the cultural-social-political context of Vietnam. For example, as stated earlier, the prestige that Vietnamese culture clearly motivates lecturers to try for higher qualifications and 'titles'. In addition, we also argue that the manner in which Classroom Observations, University-Based Conferences/Seminars, and Self-learning are utilised in Ha Tinh University is distinctive in terms of Vietnamese type.

The collective and group-focussed Vietnamese culture with interdependence between members, personal caring is more significant than independence [Vasavakul 2019]. These include the mandatory Workshops, University-Based Conferences/Seminars, and Academic Professional Meetings. These strategies as well as Coaching-Mentoring and Classroom Observations, provided opportunities for those lecturers to share and learn values and norms of the university professional community to improve their knowledge, attitudes, responsibilities and academic skills.

It is true that these 'localised practices' result from the political-social-cultural context of Vietnam is not to prove that everything works perfectly. For example, lecturers who were ready to choose to register for Degree Upgrading reported feeling considerably stressed and in some cases, fear of failure for losing face. Even while lecturers acknowledged the significance of Classroom Observations, some also stated feeling scared and anxious. Thus, our characterization of these strategies as 'localised' does not mean to suggest that they are all necessarily effective in all cases. Moreover, not all strategies in

this investigation will necessarily transfer to other countries whose socio-cultural-political values and norms are different.

## 7. Limitations of the Investigation

The limitation of this paper comes from its design as a single site case study. While this approach allowed the authors to study one particular case in depth, the results cannot be generalized to other universities in Vietnam. Future research will need to affirm the extent to which Ha Tinh University is typical within the Vietnamese higher education system, by examining the extent to which the scope and intensity of lecturer participation in LPD found in this University describes Vietnamese higher education settings more generally. In addition, future research should examine a larger sample for better generalization.

## 8. Conclusion

This investigation was conducted both to fill the gap in knowledge of professional learning of lecturers in a Vietnamese context and to add to a growing world literature. The investigation reinforces earlier descriptive efforts to outline lecturer professional learning in Western (e. g., [Vescio et al. 2008]) and East Asian [Paine, Fang 2006; Qian, Walker 2013] countries.

The need for lecturers to grow, adapt and develop new professional subject knowledge and teaching method/research skills over their career period has reinforced the importance of LPD as a university achievement strategy. This can be the early investigation that tried to provide lecturer learning strategies in a typical higher education institution in Vietnam.

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