**Research Article**

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS: SOME VIEWS OF LECTURERS

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**ABSTRACT**

*Professional development of university lecturers plays a decisive role in the quality of training of higher education institutions. Vietnamese university lecturers are required to have a master's degree or higher. Professional development includes many different activities. This study was conducted at Vietnam National University – Hanoi, University of Education (VNU UEd), and simultaneously used two quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods applied for a survey of 45 random lecturers through online surveys. The qualitative method by making lanterns and surveying six lecturers who are Ph.D. students.*

*The research results show that there are differences in some professional development activities between lecturers who are masters and doctors as regards the number of publications in international journals; Most doctoral lecturers are willing to share professional knowledge with colleagues; There is an equal proportion of lecturers (Masters, PhDs) seeking advice on professional teaching development, from associations or professional networks, however, the proportion of lecturers with master's degree seeking advice from colleagues and managers is higher than the lecturers who are doctors; The identification of barriers to professional development differs among lecturers (masters and PhDs) on financial constraints, lack of time due to the large workload, lack of information on how to be good at professional development and teaching skills.*

*Keywords***: professional development; barriers; workload; financial; university**

## 1. Introduction

In Vietnam, higher education (HE) policy is, in large part, the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). Two recent reform measures taken by MOET, the Education Law of 2012 and the Education Development Strategy, aims to facilitate the country's economic ambitions by improving the country's education system. Under the Higher Education Law, Vietnamese HE institutions are divided into two

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categories: public and private. Public institutions are established and funded by the government. Meanwhile, private HE institutions may be owned and operated by a range of entities; social organizations, socio-professional organizations, private economic organizations or individuals. In 1993, the first private HE institutions were established to alleviate the demand placed on public institutions of higher education. However, among other things, private HE institutions commonly suffer from low quality of teaching due to a lack of qualified academic staff. Out of 77,000 higher education faculty, there were only 36,347 with a Master's degree and 9,126 with a PhD (as of 2015). Thus, the MOET has made it a goal to increase the proportion of faculty with Master's and PhD degrees, a necessary step to push Vietnam's HE institutions to the regional and global stages.

A severe shortage of qualified teachers exists at all levels of education, not simply at the HE levels. To combat this and other systemic issues plaguing the Vietnamese educational system, the Education Development Strategy offers a pragmatic approach; increased the number of teacher training institutions with modern facilities and equipment to 90, gave a lot of priorities to two key teacher training universities (one in Hanoi – Ha Noi University of Education – and the other in Ho Chi Minh City – University of Pedagogy), and allotted more funds to bolster and upgrade existing training institutions in ethnic and rural areas to ensure that each province or city will have one teacher training college with qualified lecturers. To meet these objectives, Vietnam has made Education a top national policy.

In recent years, professional learning in Vietnam has gained the prominence in the field of higher education since it is an incentive for a better career. There are three fundamental implications for people to pursue master degrees in Vietnam, which are believed to be similar in the UK. The first motivation, making teacher professional learning a standards-based approach, is definitely the matter of socialization. According to Biesta (2009), a professor of Education in the UK in Brunel University London, ways in which, through education, we become members of and part of particular social, cultural and political 'orders.' Teachers have been striving to develop themselves to meet the higher and higher standards as the innovative society goes in terms of practically working application. The other significance lies in lecturers' academic development. The desire to enhance the expertise integrates their freedom for further creativity and interest in the field for the sake of teachers themselves and students. Besides, teacher development through HE facilitates research engagement into practical projects which are eventually the point of master degree. Last but not least, the fact is that the more and better education that individuals possess, the better their returns in financial rewards and the better the national economy flourishes (Gillies, 2011).

## 2. Literature review

Teachers are one of the most influential and powerful forces for equity, access and

quality in education and key to sustainable global development. However, their training, recruitment, retention, status and working conditions remain preoccupying (UNESCO). Teaching is a form of public service that requires teachers to specialize in knowledge and professional skills, to gain and accumulate through earnest and continuous research; it also requires gifted individual and a collective responsibility for education and students' duty. The development of professional identity is equivalent to the process of becoming a teacher, including the understanding of education, professional training, and the self in educational practice. This process enables future educators "to become teachers with the appropriate activities in profession and practice and are willing to take responsibility for their actions; in other words, teachers have the ability to do everything as well-experienced person in education (Ten Dam, & Bloom, 2006, p.651)

Teaching, research and community service are some of the major functions of lecturers at higher education institutions. Research and publications are the most important for the lecturers, especially for lecturers of research-oriented universities. "The advancement of knowledge through scientific research has long been recognized as one of the major goals of universities" (Neumann & Finaly-Neumann 1990, p. 565). In the United Kingdom, the University Grants Committee identified research as not only a primary function of a university but also as an integral aspect of the work of academics (Aitkin 1991). One of the major and most important criteria of determining the best academics is by the reputation they command in research and publications. Based on the results of the research and academic publications assessed by the term, lecturers can be promoted to higher levels and assigned to teach more advanced classes, and their prestige increases.

Richards (2006) highlighted in his research that any definition of lecturer competence depends on teaching in a particular setting, the culture and values held in the community.

Amidst the publication incentive situation, lecturers are challenged to think strategically in producing scientific papers in order to get career paths ranging from faculty to professors, and in assessing their selves compared with the criteria included in the policies developed by the Government in the scientific field (Ansari Saleh Ahmar et al., 2018).

Teaching should be an important role in universities. Lecturers can play a significant role in guiding student learning in higher education by designing conducive learning environments and using instructional strategies that support intended learning (Saroyan & Amundsen, 2004). From a social constructivist perspective, learning activities and environments should enable students to interact with the instructor and other students to construct new knowledge (O'Donnell, 2011). The modeling, coaching, and scaffolding that is done in the course of instruction assist students in their learning processes (Collins, 2006).

Professional work is a work that can be conducted by those who are trained. It is not a work conducted by those who cannot do it or who do not get other an occupation (Sudjana, 1995). Although lecturers are not assigned to teach all the time, teaching is still their main job and should be conducted professionally. Because of this profession, then teaching should be conducted seriously. The lecturer position is a professional position which should be conducted professionally (Soekartawi et al., 1995).

Although teachers are a profession loved by many people such as the respect of society, the opportunity to continue learning... (Pham et al., 2018), university lecturers face many barriers and obstacles in the career development process.

Nguyen (2008) proposed in the article "Lecturers' evaluation criteria" in Vietnam criteria to evaluate the competence of lecturers in three areas of teaching, research, and social and community services. Competing demands between research, teaching and service, especially in research-intensive universities limits faculty members' time and their opportunity to focus on teaching excellence (Brownell & Tanner, 2012).

Pham (2017) placed university lecturers in the context of 4.0 with the need to be creative and constantly innovating. The paper presents three groups of factors affecting the development of a creative competence for university lecturers, including the group of operational elements at the policy level (Government and the Ministries), the group of operational factors at the operational level (University, faculty, subject group), and the group of operational factors of each university lecturer (individual competence). Time constraint is reported as one of the main barriers for the improvement of teaching in Arts, Biology, and Science disciplines (Brownell, & Tanner, 2012; Lind, 2007; Sunal, et al., 2001). Academic workload is generally intense (Fink, 2003; Pham, 2018), and faculty members have to make choices on how to use their time. The great importance placed on research productivity for tenure and promotion leads faculty members, especially junior faculty, to assign higher value to research and spend most of their time on research activities (Radloff, 2008).

## 3. Methodology

This study was conducted at the University of Education and used quantitative and qualitative methods simultaneously. A quantitative method was applied with 45 random teachers answering an online survey. A qualitative method was used by making lanterns and surveying six lecturers who are PhD students.

The questionnaire was sent to the lecturers by emails at VNU University of Education from the Feb, 2019 to April, 2019. There are 45 respondents (of 37.5% in total of 120 lecturers) from the lecturers in VNU UEd. Then, the researchers translated and coded all questions before importing to SPSS 20 software to analyze the data. The main tools that this study used were Descriptive, Correlation and Multi response computing.

Of the 45 participants, the percentage of female was greater than male. Most lecturers have more than 15 years working in higher education (37.78%) and have PhD degree (82.2%).

***Table 1.*** *Participants' demographic information*

| Demographic variables | | Frequency | Percentage(%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 14 | 31.11 |
| | Female | 31 | 68.89 |
| Qualification | Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma | 1 | 2.22 |
| | Master's degree | 7 | 15.56 |
| | Doctorate | 37 | 82.22 |
| Working experience (years) | 0 - 4 | 13 | 28.89 |
| | 5 - 10 | 8 | 17.78 |
| | 11 - 15 | 7 | 15.56 |
| | More than 15 | 17 | 37.78 |

The qualitative part of the study was conducted in April 2019. The research was conducted using a participatory research method. Along with the guidance of two lecturers - researchers, two PhD students who have participated in the previous experimental research on lantern making to describe the professional development process of lecturers. There are six lecturers of the University of Education and PhD students participated in this study. This qualitative research process is divided into three phases: (i) Making lanterns; (ii) describing the professional development process on the temple; (iii) Lecturers play the role of interview and are interviewed about the advantages and obstacles to the professional development process.

Lecturers - researchers are instructed on how to make lanterns, and at the same time, they are required to recall their professional development. After that, Lecturers - PhD students started to design the lanterns themselves and use the information of major milestones in their professional development and describe them on lanterns.

After completing the lantern, the Lecturer – Researcher presents the professional development process described on the lantern, including information on the reasons for choosing a teaching career at a university, professional development process, including important milestones in their career. All of the lecturers said that this research is a creative way to arouse passion for career. This qualitative method helps teachers gently recall the development process of their career.

Finally, the lecturer walked around the university and talk/ask/share about their career development. In an open space, lecturers find it easy to share perspectives on career as well as advantages and barriers in expertise. All lecturers are very pleased with this research method.

## 4.    Findings and discussion

### *4.1.  Learning community identity of the lecturers*

The development of professional identity is equivalent to the process of becoming a teacher, including the understanding of education, professional training, and the self in educational practice. This process enables future educators "to become teachers with the appropriate activities in profession and practice and are willing to take responsibility for their actions; in other words, teachers have the ability to do everything as well-experienced person in education (Ten Dam, & Bloom, 2006, p.651)

After undertaking formal teacher education, there are some ways to disseminate or share experience with colleagues. The results of the survey on the completion of professional training programs show that lecturers continue to share experiences and knowledge with their colleague by direct exchange and indirect exchange via email or through written documents or seminars.

For direct communication, 89.19% PhD used this form. The number of MSc exchanging expertise with these forms accounts for a very high rate (100%). Other forms of indirect communication such as email (54.05%), written documents (59.46%), seminars (59.46%) for PhD showed that other forms of direct exchange accounted for more than 50%. For MSc, other forms are superior (indirect communication such as via email - 71.43%, seminar - 71.43%), but in writing documents (42.86%) is quite low, possibly because MSc is not familiar with this form of exchange.

Therefore, in order to continue to improve the sharing of experience and knowledge with faculty members after participating in professional training programs, regular professional needs to create professional meetings to encourage lecturers to share what they have learned through professional development learning, as well as encourage more qualified instructors to continue sharing more in their professional network, and can consider that an encouragement / a mandatory task after training.

*Table 2. The way to disseminate or share experience with colleagues*

|  |  |  | MSc | PhD | Total | P–Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Verbal report | Yes | Number | 7 | 33 | 40 | 0.362 |
|  |  | Percent % | 100.00% | 89.19% | 90.91% |  |
|  | No | Number | 0 | 4 | 4 |  |
|  |  | Percent % | 0.00% | 10.81% | 9.09% |  |
| Informal written report e.g. by email | Yes | Number | 5 | 20 | 25 | 0.395 |
|  |  | Percent % | 71.43% | 54.05% | 56.82% |  |
|  | No | Number | 2 | 17 | 19 |  |
|  |  | Percent % | 28.57% | 45.95% | 43.18% |  |

| Formal written report | Yes | Number | 3 | 22 | 25 | 0.416 |
| | | Percent % | 42.86% | 59.46% | 56.82% | |
| | No | Number | 4 | 15 | 19 | |
| | | Percent % | 57.14% | 40.54% | 43.18% | |
| Special meeting | Yes | Number | 5 | 22 | 27 | 0.551 |
| | | Percent % | 71.43% | 59.46% | 61.36% | |
| | No | Number | 2 | 15 | 17 | |
| | | Percent % | 28.57% | 40.54% | 38.64% | |

| | | MSc | PhD | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Verbal report | Yes | 100.00% | 89.19% | 90.91% |
| | No | 0.00% | 10.81% | 9.09% |
| Informal written report e.g. by email | Yes | 71.43% | 54.05% | 56.82% |
| | No | 28.57% | 45.95% | 43.18% |
| Formal written report | Yes | 42.86% | 59.46% | 56.82% |
| | No | 57.14% | 40.54% | 43.18% |
| Professional meeting | Yes | 71.43% | 59.46% | 61.36% |
| | No | 28.57% | 40.54% | 38.64% |

## 4.2. Advising about formal teacher development

Putting Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 into practice: Professional Learning Communities in Education describers how professional learning communities (PLCs) matter for quality education, as they play an important role in the professional development and motivation of teachers and school leaders. The experiences of VVOB demonstrate how reinforcing the capacities of national and local education authorities to establish and support PLCs is of crucial importance to the success of these communities (VVOB, education for development).

*Table 3. Advising about formal teacher development*

| | | MSc | PhD | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Never sought advice on development as a teacher | Yes | 0.00% | 5.41% | 4.55% |
| | No | 100.00% | 94.59% | 95.45% |
| Colleagues (internal to your institution) | Yes | 100.00% | 89.19% | 90.91% |
| | No | 0.00% | 10.81% | 9.09% |
| Managers (internal to your institution) | Yes | 85.71% | 67.57% | 70.45% |
| | No | 14.29% | 32.43% | 29.55% |
| Colleagues (external to your institution) | Yes | 71.43% | 75.68% | 75.00% |
| | No | 28.57% | 24.32% | 25.00% |
| Professional associations or networks | Yes | 14.29% | 29.73% | 27.27% |
| | No | 85.71% | 70.27% | 72.73% |
| Friends or family | Yes | 28.57% | 24.32% | 25.00% |
| | No | 71.43% | 75.68% | 75.00% |

| | | | MSc | PhD | Total | P–Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I have never sought advice on my development as a teacher | Yes | Number | 0 | 2 | 2 | 0.529 |
| | | Percent % | 0.00% | 5.41% | 4.55% | |
| | No | Number | 7 | 35 | 42 | |
| | | Percent % | 100.00% | 94.59% | 95.45% | |
| Colleagues (internal to your institution) | Yes | Number | 7 | 33 | 40 | 0.362 |
| | | Percent % | 100.00% | 89.19% | 90.91% | |
| | No | Number | 0 | 4 | 4 | |
| | | Percent % | 0.00% | 10.81% | 9.09% | |
| Managers (internal to your institution) | Yes | Number | 6 | 25 | 31 | 0.335 |
| | | Percent % | 85.71% | 67.57% | 70.45% | |
| | No | Number | 1 | 12 | 13 | |
| | | Percent % | 14.29% | 32.43% | 29.55% | |
| Colleagues (external to your institution) | Yes | Number | 5 | 28 | 33 | 0.812 |
| | | Percent % | 71.43% | 75.68% | 75.00% | |
| | No | Number | 2 | 9 | 11 | |
| | | Percent % | 28.57% | 24.32% | 25.00% | |
| Professional associations or networks | Yes | Number | 1 | 11 | 12 | 0.400 |
| | | Percent % | 14.29% | 29.73% | 27.27% | |
| | No | Number | 6 | 26 | 32 | |
| | | Percent % | 85.71% | 70.27% | 72.73% | |
| Friends or family | Yes | Number | 2 | 9 | 11 | 0.812 |
| | | Percent % | 28.57% | 24.32% | 25.00% | |
| | No | Number | 5 | 28 | 33 | |
| | | Percent % | 71.43% | 75.68% | 75.00% | |
| | | **Total** | **7** | **37** | **44** | |

For professional development, lecturers usually communicate in the professional community. They have never sought advice on developing professional teaching skills (0% MSc and 5.41% PhD).

The sources for lecturers to seek advice on developing professional teaching skills are quite many, 100% of MSc and 89.19% are found in colleagues in the subject, faculty, and school; in which the advice received from the manager in the work unit is 85.71% MSc and 67.57% PhD. However, seeking advice from outside colleagues is also common with 71.43% of MSc and 75.68% of PhD.

The influence, impact of the association or professional network on giving advice on professional development of teaching staff does not seem to have a clear role, with only 14.29% of MSc and 29.73% PhD seeking advice from this source. There are many reasons, but in Vietnam, perhaps the association or the professional network is not strong, not attracting and promoting effectively in training, retraining and counseling for lecturers, members, especially for MA qualifications.

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Friends and family, meanwhile, are a significant source in giving advices on the development of formal teaching to faculty members. There are 28.57% of MSc and 24.32% of PhDs affected by this group, showing the social and emotional cohesion of teachers with family and friends although this is not a professional group.

### 4.3. *Barriers to the professional development*

For PhD, the main barriers are identified to be the lack of time due to high workload (78.38%), financial constraints (45.95%). For MSc, financial constraints is the biggest barrier (85.71%). According to the survey, 64.44% PhD and MSc confirm that the professional and professional development activities are the most valuable while they experienced in the career paid by their employers.

Regarding the lack of professional development time, teaching profession due to the high workload is ranked no. 1 with 57.14% MSc and 78.38% TS and P - Value = 0.234 shows that this is a recommendation for university leaders, departmental leaders. It is necessary to adjust the assignment of tasks and facilitate lecturers to complete the assigned tasks. Besides, only 14.29% of MSc and 8.11% of PhDs determined that there are no barriers in the process of professional development, teaching profession of lecturers is a sign to consider.

For MSc, 42.86% said that there was a lack of information about the best ways to develop their professional knowledge and skills (PhD is 18.92%) and 71.43% of MSc who thought that they were completely autonomous in their work and teaching profession. The survey results show that MSc need to enhance communication with peers inside and outside the university with PhD degrees, increase participation in relevant and supportive activities from the association or career networks to receive a better information support for career development process.

However, the results also show that the lack of support from managers/employers and the opportunity to have an appropriate learning is not high, with 14.29% of MSc and 16.22% of PhD, the problem is that the university lecturers are overwhelmed by their assigned tasks and lack financial resources to support their professional development.

*Table 4. The barriers to the professional development*

|  |  | MSc | PhD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of time due to workload | Yes | 57.14% | 78.38% |
|  | No | 42.86% | 21.62% |
| Lack of funding | Yes | 85.71% | 45.95% |
|  | No | 14.29% | 54.05% |
| Lack of information about the best way to develop as a teacher | Yes | 42.86% | 18.92% |
|  | No | 57.14% | 81.08% |
| Lack of support from managers/employers | Yes | 14.29% | 16.22% |
|  | No | 85.71% | 83.78% |

| Lack of suitable opportunities for learning | Yes | 14.29% | 16.22% |
| | No | 85.71% | 83.78% |
| My other commitments don't allow the time | Yes | 28.57% | 18.92% |
| | No | 71.43% | 81.08% |

| | | | MBA | Dr | Total | P - Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of time due to workload | Yes | Number | 4 | 29 | 33 | 0.234 |
| | | Percent % | 57.14% | 78.38% | 75.00% | |
| | No | Number | 3 | 8 | 11 | |
| | | Percent % | 42.86% | 21.62% | 25.00% | |
| Lack of funding | Yes | Number | 6 | 17 | 23 | 0.053 |
| | | Percent % | 85.71% | 45.95% | 52.27% | |
| | No | Number | 1 | 20 | 21 | |
| | | Percent % | 14.29% | 54.05% | 47.73% | |
| Lack of information about the best way to develop as a teacher | Yes | Number | 3 | 7 | 10 | 0.166 |
| | | Percent % | 42.86% | 18.92% | 22.73% | |
| | No | Number | 4 | 30 | 34 | |
| | | Percent % | 57.14% | 81.08% | 77.27% | |
| Lack of support from managers/employers | Yes | Number | 1 | 6 | 7 | 0.898 |
| | | Percent % | 14.29% | 16.22% | 15.91% | |
| | No | Number | 6 | 31 | 37 | |
| | | Percent % | 85.71% | 83.78% | 84.09% | |
| Lack of suitable opportunities for learning | Yes | Number | 1 | 6 | 7 | 0.898 |
| | | Percent % | 14.29% | 16.22% | 15.91% | |
| | No | Number | 6 | 31 | 37 | |
| | | Percent % | 85.71% | 83.78% | 84.09% | |
| My other commitments don't allow the time | Yes | Number | 2 | 7 | 9 | 0.562 |
| | | Percent % | 28.57% | 18.92% | 20.45% | |
| | No | Number | 5 | 30 | 35 | |
| | | Percent % | 71.43% | 81.08% | 79.55% | |
| No | Yes | Number | 1 | 3 | 4 | 0.602 |
| | | Percent % | 14.29% | 8.11% | 9.09% | |
| | No | Number | 6 | 34 | 40 | |
| | | Percent % | 85.71% | 91.89% | 90.91% | |

## 5. Conclusion

The research results conducted at the VNU UEd show that lecturers, whether at the Master's or PhD level, are aware of professional development and use different forms in career development for themselves. Teaching professional meetings are maintained and teachers always value sharing their experiences with colleagues in many different ways.

In order to encourage lecturers, especially the sharing of doctor - lecturers with master-lecturers of teaching professional groups and faculties, it is necessary to maintain regular seminars, calculation of workloads and other administrative tasks which are suitable for lecturers to have time to participate in professional seminars and self-study.

Teaching professional groups should be formed formally or through in-school and out-of-school projects/training courses to provide academic and financial supports for professional development, with a special focus on faculty groups of master and doctors candidates lecturers.

A number of professional development constraints have been identified. PhD and master lecturers face different barriers (in terms of time, finance, professional support, etc.). The University of Education needs to have appropriate support policies for groups of lecturers with different qualifications for these barriers.

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# PHÁT TRIỂN CHUYÊN MÔN GIẢNG VIÊN ĐẠI HỌC:
# MỘT SỐ QUAN ĐIỂM CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN

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**TÓM TẮT**

    *Phát triển chuyên môn giảng viên đại học có vai trò quyết định trong chất lượng đào tạo của cơ sở giáo dục đại học. Đội ngũ giảng viên đại học Việt Nam được quy định có trình độ từ thạc sĩ trở lên. Phát triển chuyên môn gồm rất nhiều hoạt động khác nhau. Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện tại Trường Đại học Giáo dục, sử dụng đồng thời hai phương pháp định lượng và định tính. Phương pháp định lượng khảo sát 45 giảng viên ngẫu nhiên thông qua phiếu khảo sát trực tuyến. Phương pháp định tính bằng làm đèn lồng và khảo sát 6 giảng viên là nghiên cứu sinh.*

    *Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy có sự khác biệt ở một số hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn giữa giảng viên là thạc sĩ và tiến sĩ như số lượng công bố khoa học trên tạp chí quốc tế; đa số giảng viên tiến sĩ sẵn sàng chia sẻ kiến thức chuyên môn nghiệp vụ với đồng nghiệp; tỉ lệ giảng viên (thạc sĩ, tiến sĩ) tìm kiếm lời khuyên/ tư vấn về phát triển nghiệp vụ giảng dạy chính quy từ đồng nghiệp, hiệp hội hoặc mạng lưới nghề nghiệp bằng nhau, tuy nhiên, tỉ lệ giảng viên là thạc sĩ tìm kiếm tư vấn từ đồng nghiệp và người quản lí nhiều hơn giảng viên là tiến sĩ; việc xác định rào cản đối với phát triển chuyên môn có sự khác nhau giữa giảng viên (thạc sĩ và tiến sĩ) về hạn chế tài chính, thiếu thời gian do khối lượng công việc nhiều; thiếu thông tin về cách thức tốt nhất để phát triển chuyên môn, nghiệp vụ giảng dạy.*

    ***Từ khóa:*** *phát triển chuyên môn; rào cản; khối lượng công việc; tài chính; đại học*