



Constructing evaluation criteria for university lecturers' competencies: Measures to enhance the quality of faculty at Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam

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Abstract

In the realm of higher education, the faculty plays an exceedingly vital role in shaping the quality of university education. Assessing the quality of higher education involves considerations across various standards such as program quality, infrastructure quality, teaching staff, student support personnel, and quality improvement measures. Among these, constructing a faculty team that ensures both quantity and quality to meet training needs and accomplish strategic objectives of each university is regarded as a paramount requirement. Evaluating faculty competencies is deemed a compulsory requirement for gauging the educational quality of contemporary universities. Faculty competency assessment is conducted based on multiple criteria, among which teaching proficiency, scientific research, and community service are recognized as three core competencies of each faculty member. This article underscores the necessity of constructing evaluation criteria for faculty competencies. Additionally, it analyzes several fundamental criteria in faculty competency assessment. Building upon this foundation, a number of solutions are proposed to implement and apply these criteria in the practical assessment of faculty competencies at Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang Province, Vietnam.

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1. Introduction

Ensuring the quality of higher education has been and continues to be a matter of great concern for many countries, organizations, and especially educational institutions over the years. Assessing the quality of higher education is considered across various standards such as program quality, infrastructure quality, teaching staff, student support personnel, and quality improvement measures. Among these, building a faculty team that ensures both quantity and quality to meet training needs and accomplish the strategic objectives of each university is regarded as a critical requirement. There are numerous international, regional, national, and institution-specific standards that have been and are being applied to evaluate the quality of education in general, including the assessment of the faculty team's quality. However, to ensure a comprehensive and distinctive evaluation of faculty teams at institutions, it is necessary to combine them with specific criteria.

In this context, developing criteria for evaluating faculty competencies is seen as a necessary requirement for measuring the quality of university faculty in general and the faculty of Tan Trao University in particular.

2. Faculty capabilities and the essentiality of establishing faculty competency assessment criteria

Higher education is facing a significant challenge: The state management methods for universities are changing slowly, failing to meet the requirements for enhancing the quality of education across the entire system and not effectively harnessing the creativity of faculty, administrators, and students. Therefore, Vietnamese higher education needs fundamental and

comprehensive innovation in all aspects: Establishing a network of higher education institutions nationwide based on self-assessment and external evaluation standards, developing university education programs oriented towards research and career directions, expanding training scale, building faculty and educational management staff, enhancing the scale and efficiency of scientific and technological activities, and refining policies for the development of higher education towards ensuring the autonomy and social responsibility of educational institutions. Among these, building faculty and educational management staff is seen as a central solution to improve the quality of education in universities.

Various approaches to understanding competency in research practice offer a multidimensional perspective on this concept. The task-based approach emphasizes an individual's ability to perform specific tasks within a given context, while the competency-based approach focuses on defining a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for a particular job or task. In contrast, the behavior-based approach assesses competency based on effective behaviors demonstrated in the workplace. Meanwhile, the outcome-based approach concentrates on the results and achievements individuals attain. Lastly, the multidimensional approach integrates different factors such as domain knowledge, technical skills, soft skills, and adaptability to the work environment, providing a comprehensive and intricate understanding of competency. The combination of these viewpoints provides a comprehensive and diverse understanding and assessment of competency in research practice.

In academic settings, particularly in higher education, lecturers play a crucial role, significantly contributing to the quality of the trained workforce. From various perspectives, there are traditional roles that each lecturer must undertake, including the roles of educator, researcher, and service provider. These primary roles are manifested through the processes of teaching, research, and community service. Corresponding to these roles are the requirements for different competencies of each lecturer, namely teaching competency, research competency, and community service competency.

To meet the requirements for each of these competencies, each lecturer must equip themselves with basic conditions such as advancing their education to attain certain academic degrees, honing skills, applying appropriate teaching methods and programs to ensure quality and effectiveness. For research competency, active participation in scientific research activities such as conducting projects, publishing scientific papers nationally and internationally is necessary. Particularly, each lecturer's self-awareness and engagement in community service activities are considered fundamental requirements for them to effectively exercise their competencies.

Firstly, the teaching competency of each lecturer is demonstrated through the quality of education and the instruction of students, encompassing the curriculum, teaching methods, lectures, as well as the process of guiding and leading students, enabling them to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes, suitable for the demands of society and the community. To enhance teaching competency, lecturers must ensure proficiency in four basic categories of knowledge and skills: subject matter expertise, knowledge of the curriculum, teaching and learning skills, and knowledge of the educational environment and system.

Additionally, meeting the requirements for this competency necessitates each lecturer's ability to organize teaching activities effectively. To achieve this, lecturers must genuinely understand the students' levels, knowledge, and understanding. By assessing the competency of different student groups, lecturers can proactively adjust and flexibly adapt teaching programs. Therefore, lecturers also need to be proactive and capable of updating information to handle, supplement, enhance, and improve teaching content to suit various student groups. Moreover, each lecturer's teaching competency is also demonstrated through their ability to develop lesson plans and effectively apply teaching methods for students.

Next, research competency is manifested through the quality and quantity of scientific publications by lecturers, as well as the effectiveness of these research endeavors on society. In other words, the research competency of lecturers is determined based on the value-added, creative, and innovative nature of scientific products, serving the development of the institution, the academic community, and contributing to the economic, social, and cultural development of the country.

Finally, community service competency can be considered one of the three core competencies of each lecturer in the current context, where the role of lecturers is not confined to the scope of a specific educational institution but is closely linked to the development of the entire community. Therefore, this competency is demonstrated through the contribution of each lecturer to the community, with the contributions bringing benefits to the community and being acknowledged by it. For example, lecturers may participate, propose ideas, develop, or implement community activities within and outside the university, domestically and internationally. The community served by the lecturer team is not limited to the university but extends beyond it to other educational institutions, research institutes, and various organizations. For instance, lecturers hold administrative roles at the school, department, faculty, or division levels, support administrative tasks as required by the university such as student affairs, party, union, and youth activities, and assist in the management of educational activities at the school, department, or division level. Community service competency requires lecturers to allocate time and effort to effectively fulfill multiple roles simultaneously. Additionally, lecturers serve the community outside the university by participating in professional activities (as consultants, managing educational units, professional associations, editorial boards of professional journals, etc.). These three competencies exhibit an interplay and mutual reinforcement, culminating in the overall competency of each lecturer. For instance, during the teaching process, lecturers may generate ideas for scientific research, which can then be applied to serve the community. Conversely, from the practical support and community service activities, lecturers may develop ideas for projects or topics that are pertinent to the challenges and limitations faced by the community. These ideas subsequently impact the community, and notably, these practical experiences serve as invaluable, vivid, and beneficial materials for students in the teaching process of each lecturer. Similarly, each activity reflects continuous formation, development, and impact, contributing to the enhancement of the lecturer's overall competency in the academic environment.

Currently, Tan Trao University is implementing the ASEAN

University Network Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) Standards for Program Assessment. The standards consist of 11 criteria related to the program (expected learning outcomes, program description, program structure and content); teaching and learning methods, student assessment, student quality and support activities, quality of support staff, lecturer quality, infrastructure and facilities, quality enhancement, and outcomes. Among these, criterion 6 directly relates to lecturer quality, focusing on building and developing a competent lecturer team that meets the training needs of the university. However, to comprehensively and specifically measure lecturer quality, constructing additional criteria to complement criterion 6 in lecturer quality assessment is necessary for several reasons:

Firstly, developing a set of criteria for assessing lecturer competency contributes to evaluating lecturer competency and addressing the limitations of criterion 6 as mentioned by AUN-QA. When considering implementation at the departmental level, it reveals certain limitations, including subjectivity and formalism in evaluating lecturer quality. Additionally, the quantitative ability of the criteria in assessing lecturer competency remains unclear and insufficiently specific.

The second reason is readily apparent; for the university, evaluating the quality of the lecturer team contributes to identifying the current status of the lecturer team and the competitiveness of the university. Based on this foundation, universities can develop their lecturer team development strategies while also being able to comprehensively and specifically assess the competence of each lecturer within the university.

Moreover, this set of criteria for evaluating lecturer competency serves as a basis for motivating each lecturer to strive for self-improvement in order to meet the mission requirements set by the university. For example, lecturers will have the proactive awareness to engage in self-study and self-enhancement to continuously improve their own capabilities. On the other hand, lecturers can also self-assess their own competencies, considering their strengths and weaknesses, and actively seek measures to overcome these limitations to enhance their competencies in accordance with the university's requirements. For these reasons, proposing a set of criteria for evaluating lecturer competency is indeed necessary.

Some basic criteria in evaluating the competence of lecturers at tan trao university

Firstly, the foundation for constructing the criteria for assessing the competence of lecturers includes theoretical and practical bases. Regarding theoretical foundations, the university can develop a combination of the AUN-QA standards for program quality assessment concerning lecturer evaluation to propose specific criteria based on the actual situation of the institution. On this basis, the university can also implement the development of more specific criteria to assess the competence of its lecturers, ensuring the specificity of the institution.

In terms of practical bases, assessing and identifying the strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics in the activities of training, scientific research, and community service of the university in general, and the lecturers in particular, will provide the basis for building appropriate evaluation criteria. Regarding the requirements and proposed content of the criteria, in addition to the criteria already included in standard

6 of the AUN-QA standards, the criteria for assessing the competence of lecturers at Tan Trao University need to meet the requirements and ensure the inclusion of the following evaluation contents:

2.1. Specialized and In-depth Knowledge: This criterion extensively evaluates the lecturer's expertise in their field of specialization. It includes a solid understanding of course content, knowledge of current developments and trends, and the ability to integrate interdisciplinary perspectives into teaching and research. Additionally, it assesses their continuous efforts to enhance and expand their knowledge through professional development activities, conference participation, and research publications in reputable journals.

2.2. Effectiveness in Teaching and Pedagogical Skills: This criterion assesses the lecturer's ability to effectively convey course content, interact with students, and create conducive learning environments. It encompasses proficiency in utilizing diverse teaching methods to cater to different learning styles, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving among students, and providing constructive feedback for improvement. Moreover, it evaluates the use of new teaching technologies and tools to enhance the learning experience and the lecturer's commitment to student success through schedule arrangements and academic support.

2.3. Research Output and Academic Contributions: This criterion evaluates the lecturer's research output and academic contributions within their academic field. It includes factors such as the quantity and quality of their publications, including peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, and conference presentations. It also assesses their involvement in research projects, ability to attract research funding, and collaboration with scholars or organizations. Furthermore, it examines the impact of their research on advancing knowledge, addressing societal challenges, and contributing to the academic community through citations, awards, and recognition.

2.4. Community Engagement and Service: This criterion assesses the lecturer's involvement in community support activities and service both within and outside the university. It includes their participation in academic committees, leadership roles, and contributions to professional associations. Additionally, it evaluates their contributions to the local, national, or international community through consulting projects, public lectures, workshops, and collaborations with industry partners or government agencies. It also assesses their commitment to promoting social responsibility, cultural diversity, and ethical values among students and the community.

2.5. Innovation and Creativity in Teaching and Research: This criterion evaluates the lecturer's ability to apply innovative and advanced teaching methods to stimulate students' curiosity and learning. It also assesses their ability to develop new research methods, discoveries, and apply new technologies to address complex issues in their field of specialization.

Proposal for implementing the application of lecturer competence evaluation criteria at tan trao university

The phase of constructing the lecturer competence evaluation criteria set.

Stage 1: Based on the lecturer competence evaluation criteria required by the university, lecturers propose their self-development plans for each stage (beginning of each semester, academic year), including the objectives to be

achieved, the measures to be implemented, the results achieved, difficulties, and advantages. Simultaneously, the university needs to conduct a comprehensive survey on the overall quality of the university's lecturer team to identify the specific characteristics of lecturers and establish appropriate criteria. The implementation involves statistical synthesis, sending individual lecturer surveys, and conducting focus group interviews (if necessary). The survey content includes personal information of lecturers, the current competence characteristics of each lecturer, and the expectations of lecturers for the university, departments, and disciplines. Furthermore, the collaboration with the university library is crucial to identify the information literacy of lecturers.

Stage 2: Developing a draft set of lecturer competence evaluation criteria with the mentioned contents (teaching competence, research competence, community service competence, and information literacy). Each competence evaluation criterion includes specific assessment indicators. This stage requires coordination between the university, departments, disciplines, and students to exchange and contribute opinions for improvement.

Stage 3: Publicly testing the criteria across the university with the permanent lecturer team (departments, disciplines) for a minimum of 2 semesters. During the application process, these criteria will be continuously adjusted to fit, and feedback from relevant parties (lecturers, students, colleagues, administrative staff) will be recorded. Besides the main coordinating role of the university, departments, disciplines, and university libraries also play a co-evaluation role with the university to make appropriate adjustments.

Stage 4: Finalizing and officially implementing the criteria to assess lecturer competence. This stage involves deploying the criteria in the university's lecturer evaluation activities, requiring fair, objective, and serious evaluation of university lecturers. Moreover, the process of perfecting the application of evaluation criteria also requires suitable improvements.

Support measures for the implementation of lecturer competency assessment criteria.

To effectively implement and apply lecturer competency assessment criteria in the institution, close collaboration among the university, lecturers, departments, and faculties is essential. For instance, the university should establish and develop an environment for teaching, scientific research, and community service tailored to the lecturers. This environment encompasses factors related to the university's culture and motivational tools for lecturers, such as reward policies and fair disciplinary actions based on results and commitments made by lecturers. Additionally, the university needs to provide feedback and appropriate disciplinary measures for lecturers who have not achieved their commitments.

Clear requirements from the university are necessary to ensure lecturers' commitment to fulfilling their duties, along with the ability to measure the results of their tasks during the academic year or semester. The university should engage in contracts or task registration with permanent lecturers, clearly defining their responsibilities. Among these roles, there should be specific proportions depending on each lecturer's capabilities in teaching-researching-serving the community. For example, a ratio of 50-40-10 could apply to lecturers proficient in academic and research skills without managerial roles at the department level, while a ratio of 30-40-30 could be for lecturers excelling in research and holding department-level management positions. Similarly, a ratio of

30-20-50 might apply to lecturers balancing university-level management duties and teaching in departments or faculties. Lecturers, on the other hand, need to be self-aware of enhancing their competencies in teaching, scientific research, and community service through activities such as participating in advanced training courses, improving teaching quality and methods, guiding students in research activities, and contributing to academic exchanges. Furthermore, they should conduct scientific research, publish articles in national and international journals, develop textbooks, and undertake research projects.

Moreover, lecturers must be committed to meeting the assessment criteria set by the university. One of the challenges faced by the university in assessing lecturer quality is the lack of commitment from lecturers themselves. Due to various reasons, many lecturers do not dedicate sufficient time and enthusiasm to meet the university's requirements.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the effective assessment of lecturer competency is a multifaceted endeavor that requires the collaborative efforts of the university, lecturers, departments, and faculties. By establishing clear criteria and fostering an environment conducive to teaching, research, and community service, universities can ensure that lecturers are equipped with the necessary resources and motivation to excel in their roles.

Furthermore, the implementation of contracts or task registrations with lecturers, outlining their responsibilities and the proportion of each role, provides a structured framework for accountability and performance evaluation. This approach allows for flexibility based on individual capabilities while maintaining consistency in expectations. Lecturers, on their part, play a pivotal role in this process by actively engaging in professional development activities, enhancing their teaching and research skills, and demonstrating commitment to meeting the university's assessment criteria. Through continuous self-improvement and dedication to their craft, lecturers not only elevate their own competencies but also contribute to the overall academic excellence of the institution.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges that may arise, including the resistance to change, time constraints, and varying levels of commitment among lecturers. Overcoming these challenges requires a collective effort and a supportive institutional culture that values continuous learning and improvement.

In navigating these challenges, universities must remain steadfast in their commitment to promoting excellence in teaching, research, and community service. By fostering a culture of accountability, innovation, and collaboration, universities can create an environment where lecturers thrive and students receive the highest quality education.

In essence, the successful implementation of lecturer competency assessment criteria is not merely a bureaucratic exercise but a reflection of the university's commitment to academic excellence and the holistic development of its faculty members. Through strategic planning, effective communication, and ongoing support, universities can empower lecturers to fulfill their potential and make meaningful contributions to the academic community and society at large.

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