

Current Status of Non-specialized Foreign Language Lecturer Development at Vietnam's Regional Universities: A Competency-Based Approach

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Abstract:

The quality of higher education in Vietnam depends strongly on the capacity of its teaching workforce, particularly lecturers responsible for foreign-language education for non-language-major students at regional universities. Despite their pivotal role in ensuring students achieve Vietnam's national foreign-language proficiency benchmarks, the professional development of non-specialized foreign language lecturers remains uneven and insufficient across regional institutions. This study investigates the current status of lecturer development in three regional universities—Thai Nguyen University, Hue University, and the University of Danang—through the lens of a competency-based human resource development (HRD) framework.

Using a mixed-methods design, the research collected data from 201 participants (100 lecturers and 101 academic managers). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and factor analysis to examine six key HRD dimensions: planning, recruitment, deployment, training, evaluation, and professional environment. Qualitative interview data were thematically analyzed to enrich and contextualize the survey findings.

Results reveal that while training and lecturer deployment are relatively well-implemented, major gaps persist in long-term workforce planning, competency-based recruitment, performance evaluation, and the creation of motivational, growth-oriented academic environments. Differences in perceptions between lecturers and managers further indicate misalignment in HRD implementation. These findings highlight the urgency of adopting a competency-based HRD model for lecturer development, ensuring alignment between institutional strategies, competency standards, and the professional needs of lecturers.

The study proposes an integrated development model centered on a competency framework specifically designed for non-specialized foreign language lecturers, emphasizing synchronized improvements across HRD functions. Practical implications and policy recommendations are offered for enhancing the quality, sustainability, and effectiveness of foreign-language teaching in regional Vietnamese universities.

Keywords: non-specialized foreign language lecturers; lecturer development; competency-based approach; regional universities; human resource development.

1. Introduction:

The quality of higher education is closely tied to the quality of the lecturer workforce. In Vietnam, lecturers are regarded as the key force determining training quality and institutional development. For the regional universities – including Thai Nguyen University, Hue University, and the University of Danang – improving the foreign language proficiency of non-language-major students is a critical strategy to meet the demands of international integration and the socio-economic development of their regions. According to the National Foreign Language Project, non-language-major university graduates must achieve at least level 3 (B1) on Vietnam's 6-level language proficiency framework. This requirement places a heavy responsibility on the non-specialized foreign language lecturers — those who teach foreign languages to students of non-language majors — at these regional universities.

However, the current situation shows that development efforts for non-specialized foreign language lecturers at regional universities have not fully met requirements. Many institutions lack long-term planning for this lecturer team; recruitment efforts face difficulties in attracting high-quality candidates; training and professional development activities are infrequent; and the working environment fails to strongly motivate lecturers. To overcome these limitations, a competency-based model for lecturer development is needed — one that emphasizes identifying and enhancing the necessary competencies of lecturers, integrated across all human resource management aspects such as planning, recruitment, utilization, training, evaluation, and creating a supportive work environment.

This study presents the theoretical foundations for competency-based development of non-specialized foreign language lecturers at three regional universities (Thai Nguyen, Hue, and Danang), and proposes a model along with specific solutions to develop this workforce. The

goal is to improve the effectiveness of foreign language teaching and learning for non-language-major students, thereby meeting national strategic objectives for foreign-language human resource development in alignment with the development strategies of the regional universities in the present context.

2. Literature Review:

2.1. Non-specialized Foreign Language Lecturers and Competency-Based Lecturer Development

In foundational research on teaching foreign languages to non-language-major university students, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) affirmed that foreign language lecturers are not only knowledge transmitters but also specialists in needs analysis, course design, and teaching coordination. A key challenge is that foreign language lecturers are often not subject-matter experts in the students' major fields, yet they must ensure that language content is relevant to the learners' academic and professional context, and concurrently develop the lecturers' own research capacity and materials design skills (Birckbichler, 1987). In *Developments in English for Specific Purposes (ESP): A Multi-disciplinary Approach*, Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) outlined a model with five multidimensional roles and competencies for ESP lecturers: (1) the teacher as a transmitter of language knowledge and skills; (2) the course designer and materials provider; (3) the researcher; (4) the collaborator who connects language instruction with practical applications; and (5) the evaluator. Research on foreign language teacher professional development has shown that the classroom role of the teacher has shifted from the "knowledge transmitter" model toward that of a designer and organizer of the learning environment (Richards, 2006; 2011). Accordingly, the lecturer is no longer merely an "explainer," but rather becomes a facilitator who supports students in building language ability through active, collaborative, and reflective learning activities (Pennington, 1996).

In the context of vigorous educational reforms, non-specialized foreign language (FL) lecturers

also play a crucial role in helping students develop intercultural communication competence (Borg, 2006; 2015), fostering educational equity, and enabling learners to adopt the thinking and communication styles of the target culture – thereby contributing to the formation of global citizens in a multi-ethnic context. They serve as promoters of critical thinking (Sibomana, 2017) and soft skills through academic activities in a foreign language (Gabryś-Barker, 2018). Non-specialized FL lecturers have a direct impact on the effectiveness of educational reforms, the quality of student learning, and learner motivation through their role as bilingual academic advisors developing communicative competence (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Lo, 2016), academic skills, and critical thinking in the L2 (Sibomana, 2017). Belcher, Johns, and Paltridge (2011) suggest that universities should recognize these lecturers as an academic support workforce for the entire institution and that non-specialized FL lecturers are experts capable of integrating language elements into content-area curricula.

Thus, the *non-specialized foreign language lecturer workforce* is understood as the body of lecturers responsible for teaching foreign language courses (especially English) to non-language-major students at multidisciplinary universities. These lecturers are usually affiliated with language faculties or centers within the university and are in charge of delivering basic foreign language courses to ensure all students meet the foreign language proficiency graduation requirements (Ghamarian, Resnik, Rieder-Marschallinger, Gruber, & Lasnik, 2024). The non-specialized FL lecturer workforce is defined by both quantity and quality criteria, and functions as a cohesive unit within a learning organization. They share a common educational goal: to educate and train learners to have sufficient foreign language ability to use the language independently and confidently in communication, study, and work in an integrative, multilingual, multicultural environment (Garaghoolee, 2024). The role of this lecturer team is extremely important in raising the overall foreign language proficiency of the future human resources in the region.

The competency-based approach emerged in the 1970s and quickly became one of the important

approaches in modern human resource development. McClelland (1973) asserted that “competence” is a reliable indicator of employee potential, marking a crucial turning point that laid the groundwork for using competencies as a central concept in HR management and development. In their study of competency-based education and training, Harris, Guthrie, Hobart, and Lundberg (1995) emphasized that a competency-based approach creates an organic link between professional standards and HR development activities. Research on this approach by Norton and Williams (1989) identified key elements in developing human resources: (1) the competencies learners need to acquire are clearly identified and communicated to them before training; (2) training programs are designed based on individual competencies and their development; (3) specific standards and conditions for evaluating training outcomes are stipulated and made public in advance; (4) learner competency is evaluated based on job performance with sufficient evidence to confirm the level of attainment. Duke and Udono (2012) highlighted five basic domains of human resource management under the traditional approach: planning, recruitment, compensation, training and development, and labor relations. These domains are interrelated and continuous, with employee performance evaluation being a core element that manifests throughout all five domains.

Developing the lecturer workforce can be viewed as a critical component of human resource development within a university. According to Nguyễn Thị Lan Anh and Nguyễn Thị Kim Nhân (2022), developing foreign language lecturers (for non-language majors) encompasses the following fundamental aspects: (1) Planning and setting development plans for the workforce; (2) Recruitment and personnel placement; (3) Training and upskilling to enhance competencies; (4) Performance evaluation; and (5) Creating an environment and motivation for lecturer growth. The ultimate goal is to continuously increase the number, quality, and optimal structure of the lecturer team to meet the institution's educational

objectives. In other words, lecturer workforce development requires not only having a sufficient number of lecturers meeting the standards for professional qualifications and pedagogy, but also achieving a reasonable faculty structure (in terms of age distribution, qualifications, specializations, academic titles, etc.) (Nguyễn Tiến Hùng, 2023).

The competency-based approach in human resource management emphasizes clearly identifying the core competencies employees need to perform their jobs effectively, and then designing all HR activities around developing those competencies (Hermosa, 2022). Applied to the context of non-specialized FL lecturers, a competency-based approach means: defining a competency framework of essential skills and knowledge for the lecturers (including foreign language proficiency, pedagogical competence, ICT proficiency, educational research competence, etc.), then using this framework as the basis for workforce planning (determining the number and composition of lecturers needed), recruiting suitable candidates, providing training to improve any missing competencies, evaluating job performance based on the attainment of these competencies, and creating a working environment that encourages lecturers to cultivate these competencies (Matsumura, 2022). The competency-based approach is regarded as a modern and effective approach in education management, as it tightly aligns output requirements with the faculty development process. Research by Ngô Huỳnh Hồng Nga (2023) also emphasizes the need to “enhance the quality of university lecturers to meet the demand for improved training quality,” and that defining a competency framework and standardizing the faculty according to that framework is the key to systematically improving quality.

2.2. Key Aspects of Lecturer Development via a Competency-Based Approach

Planning and development strategy: This is the first and foundational step, aimed at determining the needed number and quality of lecturers in both the short and long term. A competency-based approach requires that during the planning phase,

the institution must forecast which competencies the lecturer workforce will need to fulfill the university's strategic development. On that basis, appropriate plans for recruitment and training can be formulated.

Recruitment and personnel deployment: Lecturer recruitment should be organized following a competency-based approach, meaning the hiring process is designed around the predefined competency criteria. According to Decision 1400/QĐ-TTg (2008) of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Education and Training was tasked with reviewing and assessing the current situation and developing annual recruitment plans for foreign language teachers and lecturers through 2020 to ensure sufficient quantity and standardized qualifications. In the context of regional universities, recruiting high-quality non-specialized FL lecturers is challenging due to competition with larger urban institutions. Therefore, special talent-attraction policies (such as competitive salary packages or opportunities for further study) are needed to draw and retain qualified candidates. In addition, the deployment and utilization of lecturers is important: they must be assigned to teaching roles that match their expertise (for example, general English vs. ESP courses), and given reasonable teaching schedules and workloads so they can perform optimally. One management perspective holds that the institution should “align the university's development needs with the individual needs of lecturers, balancing and harmonizing these factors.” In practice, work assignments should both fulfill the institution's educational objectives and provide opportunities for lecturers to satisfy their own career development aspirations.

Training, upskilling, and competency development: This is the focal point in competency-based lecturer development. After recruitment, lecturers should receive continuous training and professional development to enhance their subject-matter expertise and pedagogical skills. Regional universities need to establish periodic professional development programs for non-specialized FL lecturers, including advanced

foreign language training (to achieve C1 or C2 proficiency), workshops on modern teaching methodologies, training in educational technology application for language teaching, development of digital learning materials, as well as training in educational research skills. The National Foreign Language Project explicitly states the need to “implement plans to train and upskill foreign language teachers at all educational levels, to supplement and standardize the workforce,” and encourages international training courses and sending teachers abroad for further training. For non-specialized FL lecturers, universities can collaborate with organizations such as the British Council or Fulbright to offer short-term training workshops; simultaneously, they should create conditions for lecturers to pursue graduate studies (master's and doctoral programs) domestically and overseas. When lecturers fully develop the required competencies (proficient in the foreign language, strong in pedagogy, and knowledgeable about the students' specialized fields), the quality of instruction will improve markedly.

Performance evaluation (competency assessment):

Lecturer performance evaluation should be tied to competency criteria to ensure objectivity and developmental orientation. At present, many institutions evaluate lecturers primarily based on teaching hours and formal achievements, which do not fully reflect actual teaching competence. Trần X. B. (2007) noted that “lecturer evaluation at universities is currently an urgent issue” and that evaluation methods need innovation. A competency-based approach suggests developing an evaluation framework with criteria such as: actual foreign language proficiency (e.g., measured by a standardized test), pedagogical skills (assessed through class observations and student feedback), student learning outcomes in the lecturer's courses, and contributions to academic and professional activities (e.g., developing course materials, conducting research on teaching methodology). Conducting evaluations regularly (annually or biannually) based on concrete evidence will help determine

the gap between a lecturer's current competencies and the expected standards, thereby forming the basis for individual development plans. Fair and transparent evaluations also motivate lecturers to strive for improvement, address their weaknesses, and serve as a basis for rewards and promotions.

Creating a supportive environment and motivation for development: The working environment is a pivotal factor that enables lecturers to fully apply and continue honing their competencies. A good developmental environment includes adequate facilities for language teaching (language classrooms, labs, audio-visual equipment, high-speed Internet in all language classrooms), a rich supply of teaching and research materials, and encouragement of an innovative teaching spirit. In addition, both material and spiritual motivators should be emphasized. The study by Nguyễn Đức Kim Ngân (2023) highlights the role of work motivation for university lecturers, suggesting that institutions should implement non-financial incentives (such as recognition of achievements and opportunities for advancement) alongside financial rewards. For regional universities—where socio-economic conditions may be less favorable than in major cities—creating motivation is even more crucial to retaining good lecturers. Possible measures include: timely rewarding of lecturers who innovate in teaching methods or attain higher qualifications, providing financial support for research or further education, reducing excessive administrative duties so lecturers can focus on their professional work, and building a collegial culture of support (e.g., pairing experienced mentors with junior lecturers). When lecturers feel respected, have opportunities for growth, and work in a favorable environment, they are more likely to stay committed long-term and contribute effectively.

In summary, the theoretical review indicates that developing the non-specialized foreign language lecturer workforce should be viewed as a holistic, continuous process encompassing multiple stages from planning to motivation. The competency-based approach is the red thread running through

all these stages, ensuring that all personnel management activities are geared toward enhancing the actual competencies of lecturers, thereby sustainably improving the quality of non-specialized foreign language education.

3. Research Methodology:

3.1 Participants and Sampling

To assess the current status of non-specialized foreign language lecturer development at regional universities, we conducted a survey using a questionnaire combined with follow-up interviews. The survey was carried out at three regional universities: Thai Nguyen University, Hue University, and the University of Danang – representing the Northern midland and mountainous area, the North Central region, and the South Central region, respectively. The respondents were divided into two groups: non-specialized foreign language lecturers (100 individuals) and managerial staff involved in developing this lecturer workforce (101 individuals, including heads of language faculties, personnel department officers, members of university leadership, etc.). A total of 201 valid responses were collected.

3.2 Data Collection Instruments

Survey: We developed a structured questionnaire based on the competency-based lecturer development framework outlined in the literature. The questionnaire contained sections corresponding to major factor groups (e.g., external, internal, personal, and learner-related factors), with specific items examining various aspects such as policies and institutional support, working conditions, personal career goals, and student attitudes. Respondents were asked to rate the influence or status of each item using a five-point Likert scale (with 1 indicating “Not influential/Very low” and 5 indicating “Very influential/Very high”). The questionnaire covered six key content areas of lecturer development aligned with the competency-based approach: (1) workforce planning; (2) recruitment; (3) utilization and work assignment; (4) training and

upskilling; (5) performance evaluation; and (6) professional environment and motivation.

Interviews: In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected lecturers and managers to gather deeper qualitative insights corresponding to the above six aspects. Interviewees were prompted to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions regarding each aspect of lecturer development. These interviews provided contextual information and examples to complement and explain the survey results.

3.3 Data Analysis

For the quantitative survey data, responses were coded and analyzed using SPSS (Version 25). First, reliability analysis was performed on each set of Likert-scale items corresponding to the defined factor groups, using Cronbach's alpha to ensure the internal consistency of items in each category. Next, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to verify that the survey items grouped into the expected conceptual factors and to check if any sub-factor structure emerged from the data. Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean scores for each item and frequency distributions for demographic data) were calculated to compare the average responses of lecturers and managers on each item and to summarize the characteristics of the sample.

Finally, Pearson correlation analysis and multiple regression were used to examine relationships between factors and overall measures of job motivation or satisfaction (for example, to assess how strongly each factor predicts an overall motivation score), though these particular results are beyond the scope of the present discussion. Additionally, independent-samples *t*-tests and one-way ANOVAs were performed to examine differences in certain outcomes by participant characteristics such as gender and highest qualification (Bachelor's, Master's, PhD). Effect sizes (Cohen's *d* for *t*-tests and η^2 for ANOVA) were calculated to assess the magnitude of any group differences. For the qualitative data from interviews, a thematic analysis approach was

employed. Interview transcripts were reviewed and coded for common themes corresponding to the six aspects in the framework. Participant quotations and summaries were extracted to illustrate how particular factors had impacted their motivation or professional development, either positively or negatively. These qualitative insights are integrated into the results to provide a richer understanding of the patterns observed in the survey data.

4. Results and Analysis:

4.1 Survey Results

The survey results provide an overall picture of the current state of non-specialized foreign language lecturer development at the regional universities, revealing many shortcomings that need to be addressed.

Table 1 Summarizes the average ratings from lecturers and managers on each aspect of lecturer development.

Item	Aspect/Criteria	Lecturers		Managers	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Planning	3.35	0.62	3.55	0.58
1.1	Clear strategy for faculty development	3.30	0.60	3.55	0.58
1.2	Planning aligned with actual needs	3.35	0.62	3.50	0.56
1.3	Planning based on lecturer competencies	3.40	0.63	3.60	0.60
2	Recruitment	3.30	0.64	3.50	0.60
2.1	Clear recruitment criteria	3.25	0.66	3.45	0.60
2.2	Competency-based recruitment	3.30	0.64	3.50	0.58
2.3	Transparent recruitment process	3.35	0.63	3.55	0.59
3	Deployment & Assignment	3.40	0.60	3.60	0.55
3.1	Reasonable teaching assignments	3.35	0.60	3.55	0.56
3.2	Utilizing lecturers according to competencies	3.40	0.58	3.60	0.55
3.3	Appropriate job rotation	3.45	0.62	3.65	0.57
4	Training & Development	3.45	0.58	3.65	0.54
4.1	Sufficient training opportunities	3.40	0.56	3.60	0.54
4.2	Training meets competency needs	3.45	0.58	3.65	0.52
4.3	Encouragement for continuous development	3.50	0.57	3.70	0.53
5	Evaluation	3.25	0.66	3.45	0.62
5.1	Clear evaluation criteria	3.20	0.70	3.40	0.65
5.2	Fair evaluation process	3.25	0.68	3.45	0.60
5.3	Evaluation reflects true competencies	3.30	0.66	3.50	0.62
6	Work Environment & Motivation	3.20	0.70	3.40	0.65
6.1	Supportive work environment	3.20	0.72	3.40	0.68
6.2	Career motivation for lecturers	3.18	0.70	3.38	0.66
6.3	Opportunities for advancement	3.22	0.68	3.42	0.64
		3.33		3.53	

Planning:

For the workforce planning aspect, with average scores of 3.35 (lecturers) and 3.55 (managers), planning is rated at a moderately good level, indicating that the universities have some overall faculty development plans in place. However, the gap between the two groups' ratings suggests that there may be limitations in how well strategic plans are communicated to lecturers or the extent of lecturer involvement in the planning process. Interview feedback revealed that forecasting the demand for foreign language lecturers is still reactive; long-term plans (5–10 years) have rarely been formulated, with hiring mainly responding to immediate needs. This has led to situations in which some institutions face a shortage of foreign language lecturers when expanding enrollment, or conversely, have a surplus of lecturers in other fields but a shortage in foreign languages. The lack of systematic planning also leaves lecturers feeling their career path is unclear (e.g., no well-defined promotion or advancement pathways), which is a serious weakness because poor planning can have a cascading negative effect on all other faculty development activities.

Recruitment:

The average scores for recruitment were 3.30 (lecturers) and 3.50 (managers), suggesting that institutions have gradually improved recruitment criteria and processes. Nonetheless, lecturers still perceive issues with the transparency and competitiveness of the hiring process. Many regional campuses, being in more remote areas, struggle to attract top candidates (for instance, graduates with master's or PhD degrees in foreign languages tend to prefer staying in major cities). Interview results indicate that salary levels and development opportunities at regional universities are not sufficiently competitive. Although these universities have prioritized hiring local graduates who studied abroad or top graduates from domestic programs, the pool of applicants remains limited. Another problem is that the recruitment process still places heavy emphasis on formal qualifications (e.g., requiring a master's degree in

foreign languages) rather than rigorously evaluating practical competencies. Only about 40% of lecturers felt the selection process adequately tested candidates' teaching skills and real English proficiency. This reflects a common challenge among public universities in Vietnam, which operate under civil service hiring mechanisms and face a limited pool of high-quality candidates. As a result, truly competency-based recruitment has not been thoroughly implemented.

Deployment and Assignment:

This aspect received relatively high scores (mean of about 3.40–3.60), making it the strongest of the six surveyed areas. Both lecturers and managers agreed that teaching assignments, task allocation, and overall utilization of personnel are done relatively well. This indicates that the universities have made considerable efforts to optimize existing human resources, especially in contexts of lecturer shortages in newer language specializations like applied Korean, Japanese, or Chinese. However, some lecturers reported being assigned too many large classes, exceeding standard teaching loads, which affects teaching quality and leaves little time for self-study or professional development. There have also been cases where foreign language lecturers must concurrently take on heavy administrative duties or teach subjects outside their specialization (e.g., being seconded to teach unrelated courses), leading to a dispersion of focus. On the positive side, at some units the leadership has attempted to reduce teaching loads or assign lecturers according to their strengths (for example, a lecturer strong in a particular language skill is tasked with coaching that skill to students). Overall, while deployment is effective to an extent, it is not yet optimized to both leverage each individual's competencies and ensure an equitable workload distribution.

Training and Professional Development:

This area achieved the highest ratings (averages around 3.45–3.65), reflecting the strong investment regional universities have made in

building the capabilities of their lecturer workforce. Workshops on pedagogical skills, advanced language training, and updates on new teaching methodologies are conducted fairly regularly. However, a noted limitation is the lack of professional development programs tailored to the specific competency framework of non-specialized foreign language lecturers – a group whose professional needs differ from those of regular foreign language faculty. In the past three years, approximately 70% of lecturers participated in at least one short-term training course (mainly those organized by the National Foreign Language Project or international partnership projects). However, the number of lecturers sent for long-term training (master's or doctoral study) remains low; for example, at Thai Nguyen University only 3 out of 20 non-specialized FL lecturers are currently PhD candidates, at Hue 2 out of 15, and at Danang 4 out of 18. Reasons include lack of funding and heavy teaching loads that make it difficult for lecturers to take time off for extended studies. Moreover, the content of training has not been closely aligned with practical teaching competencies: many lecturers wish for training on teaching English for Specific Purposes in various disciplines, or on online teaching methodologies, but these needs have yet to be met. On a positive note, some lecturers have proactively pursued self-study (joining MOOCs, self-preparing for international certifications like IELTS or TESOL). However, without structured support from the institution, such individual efforts are hard to scale up and sustain.

Evaluation:

Although the evaluation of lecturers is rated at a fairly moderate level (averages ~3.25–3.45), it remains the weakest link in faculty development. Lecturers feel that current evaluation criteria do not truly reflect their competencies, contributions, or teaching and research outcomes. Managers consider the evaluation system relatively sufficient but acknowledge it is not closely tied to professional standards or a competency framework. Evaluation criteria are mostly based on metrics like teaching hours, the percentage of

students meeting language benchmarks, and formal commendations, rather than on assessing substantive teaching competency. Only 30% of lecturers feel that current evaluations “accurately reflect my competencies and contributions.” Notably, many lecturers reported they seldom receive specific feedback after evaluations to help them improve. While student course feedback is collected, it is not given due weight in lecturer evaluations. This points to a management gap: evaluation is not yet being used as a tool for competency development, but remains a bureaucratic formality. This is an area in urgent need of improvement, as effective evaluation would provide critical information to guide training efforts and motivate lecturers to progress.

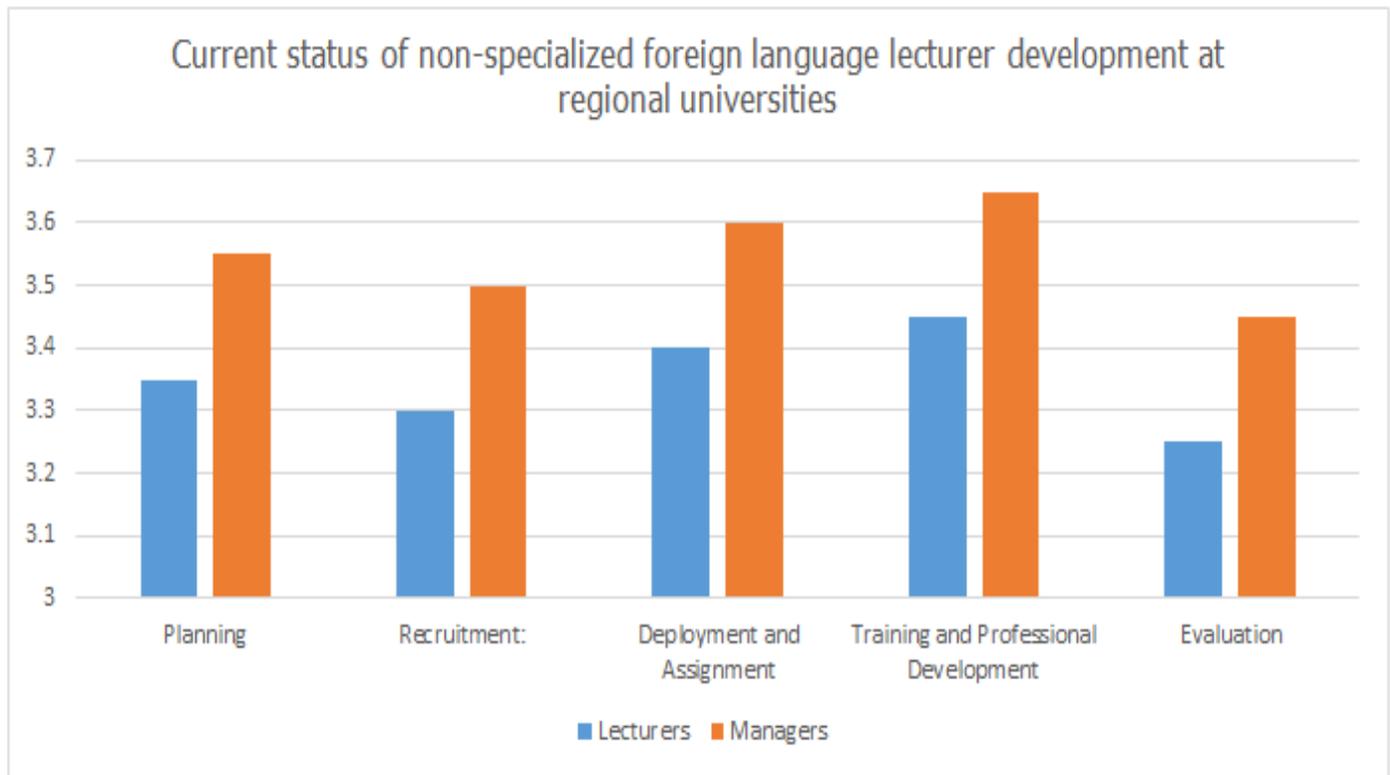
Work Environment and Motivation:

This aspect received the lowest scores among the six, though still around the mid-range (3.20–3.40). Respondents noted that lecturers have few opportunities for advancement, face high workload pressures, and experience a scholarly environment that is not yet truly vibrant. In particular, young lecturers lack opportunities to engage in research or international projects – factors that are important for long-term career development. Key issues raised include: the income of non-specialized FL lecturers is generally lower than that in fields like economics or engineering (due in part to fewer outside consulting opportunities); facilities for foreign language teaching in some places are still inadequate (e.g., insufficient language labs or outdated audio-visual equipment); and heavy teaching loads (many large classes) are paired with limited promotion prospects since few high-level positions are designated for non-specialized language teaching. As a result, the morale of some lecturers is not high; there is a phenomenon of younger lecturers treating these positions as stepping stones and being ready to leave for larger cities when opportunities arise. On the management side, about 50% concede that current incentive policies “are not strong enough to retain and motivate excellent foreign language lecturers.” Although a few universities have tried

initiatives such as rewarding lecturers who innovate in teaching or subsidizing doctoral study

costs, overall the human resource development environment remains inconsistent.

Figure 1. Current status of non-specialized foreign language lecturer development at regional universities.



In summary, the above findings show that the development of non-specialized foreign language lecturers at regional universities still has numerous limitations across all stages: from planning to recruitment, training, evaluation, and motivation. These shortcomings partly explain why the quality of foreign language teaching and learning for non-language majors at many institutions remains lower than expected. This situation forms the basis for our proposed model and the remedial solutions discussed in the following sections.

4.2 Overall Observations from the Survey Data

Strengths of the current HRD system: Strategic orientation and long-term planning are relatively clear. Training and professional development activities receive the highest level of investment among all aspects. The deployment and assignment of lecturers are quite effective and receive agreement from both lecturers and managerial staff.

Key shortcomings requiring priority action: A gap remains between the perceptions of lecturers and those of managers. Recruitment practices are not yet truly flexible or competitive. The lecturer evaluation system is not linked to a clear competency standard. The academic environment, career motivation, and advancement opportunities for lecturers are still limited.

Implications for non-specialized FL lecturer development: The survey data confirm the necessity of adopting a competency-based HRD model. Any solutions must be systemic and concurrently address planning, recruitment, deployment, training, evaluation, and the professional environment, rather than implementing isolated fixes.

5. Proposed Competency-Based Development Model for Non-specialized FL Lecturers

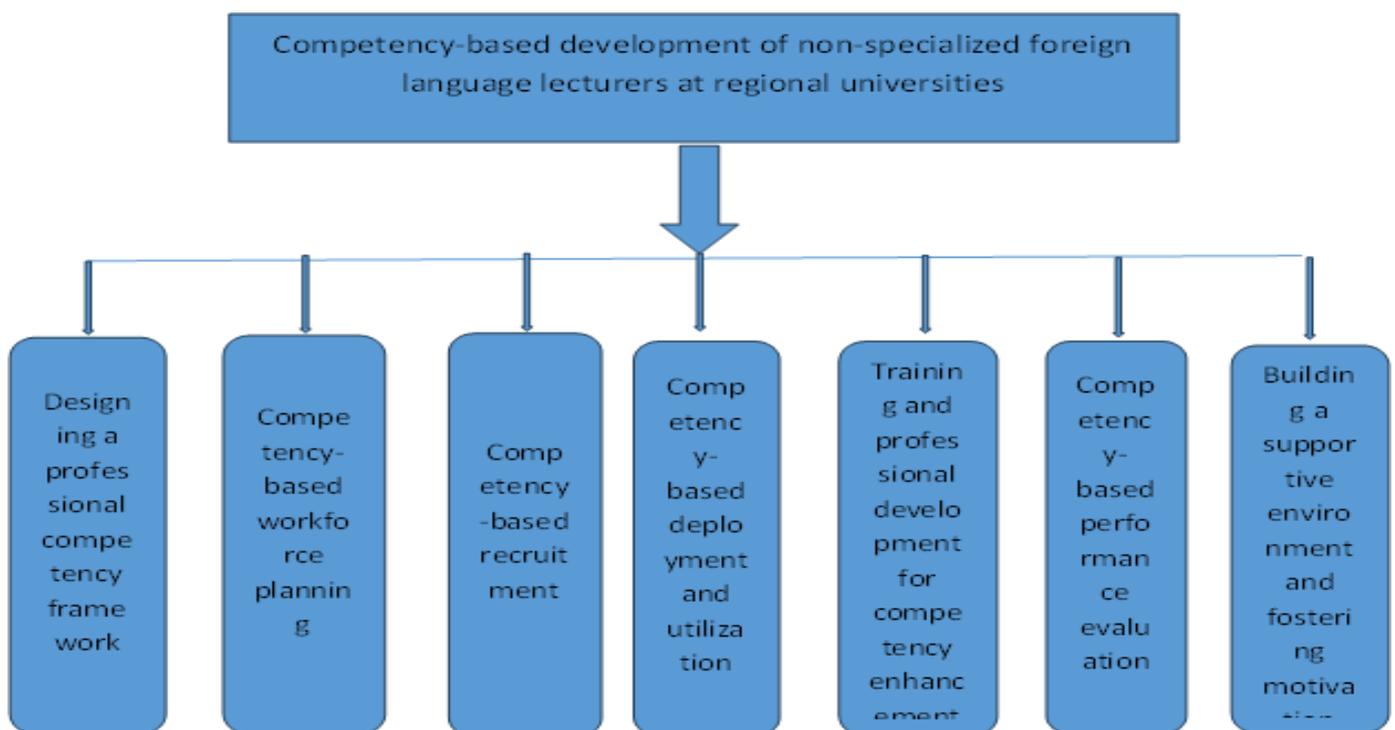
Based on the theoretical foundations and the empirical findings discussed above, we propose a competency-based development model for the

non-specialized foreign language lecturer workforce at regional universities. The model consists of the following key components:

- **Competency Framework for Non-specialized FL Lecturers:** This is the foundation of the model, comprising the set of core competencies that a non-specialized foreign language lecturer needs to effectively fulfill their duties. The competency framework is built with reference to the national professional standards for university lecturers issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (Circular 36/2014/TT-BGDĐT-BNV), as well as the specific nature of teaching foreign languages to non-major students. The main groups of competencies include:
 1. Foreign language proficiency (e.g., English proficiency at C1 level or above, correct pronunciation, strong communication skills in the target language);
 2. Foreign language pedagogical skills (ability to design lesson plans, organize communicative learning activities, and assess students' language progress);
 3. Understanding of students' specialized fields (knowledge of the academic or professional

domains of the students in order to effectively teach English for Specific Purposes in those fields);

4. Ability to apply information technology and modern teaching methods (proficiency in using e-learning platforms, language teaching software, and up-to-date pedagogical techniques);
 5. Research and self-development skills (conducting educational research, engaging in continuous professional development and reflective practice);
 6. Professional attributes (adherence to academic ethics, collegiality, and a growth-oriented mindset).
- This competency framework should be translated into measurable evaluation criteria, which will serve as the basis for all subsequent HR management activities.
- **Integrated HRM Functions in a Closed-Loop Process:** The proposed model integrates the functions of planning, recruitment, utilization, training, evaluation, and incentives into a closed-loop process, in which information about lecturer competencies is continually fed back and updated at each stage. In this integrated process, the key HRM functions include:



- **Planning:** Based on the competency framework and the university's strategic development goals, determine the required number and composition of lecturers over the medium and long term (e.g., 5-year, 10-year plans); develop corresponding recruitment and training plans to meet these targets.
- **Recruitment:** Design job postings and selection processes around evaluating candidates' competencies (for example, conduct interviews in English, require a teaching demonstration, administer skills tests). Give priority to candidates who meet or show strong potential to meet the defined competency framework.
- **Deployment (Utilization):** Assign lecturers to positions that match their competencies (e.g., those strong in listening–speaking skills teach basic communication classes, those with subject-matter knowledge assist in ESP courses). Arrange reasonable workloads so that lecturers have time for self-improvement. Establish clear career pathways: for instance, after 2–3 years of good performance, a lecturer can be considered for appointment to positions such as course team leader or deputy head of department.
- **Training and Development:** Formulate personalized development plans based on periodic competency evaluation results. Each lecturer should have an individual development plan (IDP) detailing what specific training or upskilling is needed (foreign language improvement, pedagogical training, research skills, etc.) and targets to achieve each year. The university should organize regular in-house workshops, invite external experts, or sponsor lecturers to attend advanced training, ensuring that every lecturer is continuously updated and improving. Encourage the formation of professional groups or communities of practice where non-specialized FL lecturers within and across regional universities can share experiences and learn from each other.
- **Evaluation:** Implement a multi-source (360-degree) evaluation system based on the competency framework criteria. Combine self-evaluation, student evaluations (through course feedback surveys), peer evaluation (through reciprocal class observations), and management evaluation (by department heads or deans). The results of evaluations should not only rank performance but, more importantly, identify competency gaps for each lecturer relative to the framework. Each evaluation report should come with concrete recommendations for the lecturer (e.g., which specific skills need improvement and suggested training opportunities).
- **Rewards and Motivation:** Design the incentive system to be linked with demonstrated competencies and performance outcomes. Lecturers who perform well in evaluations and show commitment to improving their competencies should be duly rewarded (e.g., accelerated salary increases, formal commendations, priority for opportunities to pursue further studies). At the same time, foster a work environment that is democratic and encourages innovation: lecturers should have the right to propose improvements to curricula or teaching methods, and the leadership should listen and provide support. Maintain supportive policies such as reduced teaching loads for lecturers pursuing graduate degrees, funding for attending academic conferences, or establishing an English club for lecturers to practice language skills. All these measures aim to create a virtuous cycle: the more a lecturer enhances their competencies, the more rewards and opportunities they receive, which in turn motivates further professional growth.
- **Coordination and Monitoring Mechanism:** For the model to operate effectively, there must be unified direction

from the university level (or from the regional university administration in the case of member colleges). A steering committee or task force for lecturer development (comprising representatives from the university leadership, the personnel department, the language faculty, and the language center) should oversee implementation of the development plans, and periodically review and adjust the competency framework and HR strategies to suit real conditions. In addition, key performance indicators (KPIs) should be established to evaluate the outcomes of the development process itself (e.g., the percentage of lecturers attaining C1 proficiency, the proportion of lecturers pursuing doctoral studies, lecturer satisfaction with the work environment, etc.). These indicators will help the institution assess the effectiveness of the model and make continuous improvements.

The above model emphasizes the tight linkage between the various stages of lecturer development, with everything oriented toward improving lecturer competencies. It is not only a theoretical model but also aligns with the faculty development directions of the regional universities, which focus on quality, effectiveness, and balancing local needs with broader integration. In the context of current higher education reforms, this competency-based model is expected to help regional universities overcome existing shortcomings and build a stronger team of non-specialized foreign language lecturers, thereby fundamentally improving the quality of foreign language education.

6. Proposed Solutions for Competency-Based Lecturer Development at Regional Universities

Building on the proposed model, we recommend a number of specific solutions to develop the non-specialized foreign language lecturer workforce in ways that also align with the overall strategic development of the regional universities:

- 1. Establish and implement a competency framework for non-specialized FL lecturers:** In the immediate short term, each regional university should develop a set of competency standards for their non-specialized foreign language lecturers. This set of standards should be promulgated at the institutional (or regional-university) level to serve as the basis for lecturer evaluation and development. Key benchmarks should be identified, for example: foreign language proficiency (IELTS 7.0 or equivalent to C1), pedagogical skills (completion of a certified university pedagogy training program, ability to employ active learning methods), and ICT proficiency (mastery of online teaching software and basic e-learning content design). After the competency framework is established, it needs to be applied uniformly across HR practices: from recruitment (making the framework criteria part of hiring requirements), to annual evaluations (measuring the extent to which each lecturer meets the standards), and in designing training plans for lecturers who have not yet met certain benchmarks.
- 2. Enhance strategic workforce planning and recruitment practices:** Each regional university should formulate a rolling 5-year plan for developing their non-specialized FL lecturer workforce. This plan should detail how many lecturers need to be recruited each year, with what qualifications and specializations, and concurrently outline a roadmap for current staff to achieve higher degrees (e.g., earning doctorates) and academic titles. In recruitment, diversify the candidate pool: beyond domestic graduates, proactively attract foreign-trained Vietnamese graduates or invite native-speaker instructors as visiting lecturers for certain courses (aligning with the policy encouraging hiring foreign experts for language teaching). The hiring process must be transparent and comprehensive: for instance, in addition to panel interviews, have candidates conduct a

mock teaching session to assess practical pedagogical skills, and require submission of international English certificates to ensure language proficiency. After hiring, implement a mentorship program for newcomers: each new lecturer should be paired with an experienced mentor in the first year to help them quickly integrate and develop necessary skills.

3. Strengthen training and professional development to meet practical needs:

Annually, regional universities should allocate adequate budget for lecturer professional development. Specific measures include: (a) coordinate with international organizations (British Council, Fulbright, Aus4Skills, etc.) to host on-site short courses, updating lecturers on modern language teaching methods and international-standard assessment practices; (b) sponsor lecturers for postgraduate studies – for example, institute policies to encourage young lecturers to pursue doctoral degrees by providing partial or full funding for tuition, and by securing their positions and salary during the study period; (c) implement in-house group training through a “colleagues progress together” model – e.g., have expert lecturers share skills with peers via internal seminars (such as training colleagues in using educational software or basics of ESP in fields where some are less confident); (d) require and facilitate each lecturer to have an annual self-improvement plan – for example, working toward a higher-level language certificate or publishing a teaching methodology paper (and consider counting substantial research or self-study achievements toward their workload). Training offerings should be flexible in both content and format (in-person, online, or blended), and closely targeted to the competencies that evaluations have identified as weak points for individuals and the team as a whole.

4. Innovate the lecturer evaluation process: Develop an effective performance evaluation

system (with clear KPIs) for non-specialized FL lecturers that includes key metrics such as: student language proficiency outcomes in courses taught by the lecturer; average student feedback scores for the lecturer's courses; number of professional development hours the lecturer has completed; and any teaching innovations the lecturer has implemented. Combine quantitative KPI evaluation with qualitative feedback and interviews. Importantly, use evaluation results in a developmental manner: after each evaluation cycle, organize one-on-one feedback meetings between department leaders and each lecturer to discuss strengths, weaknesses, the lecturer's own aspirations, and to agree on development goals for the next period. Foster a culture of constructive feedback—avoid punitive criticism and instead encourage lecturers to be open about difficulties so that leadership can help resolve them. For example, if a lecturer's performance in teaching speaking skills is below expectations (based on student feedback), rather than reprimand them, the department could recommend that they observe a colleague who excels in teaching speaking or attend a relevant training workshop.

5. Improve the working environment and incentive policies:

Regional universities must recognize that in order to retain and motivate foreign language lecturers, the institution needs to meet their legitimate needs even as it requires them to improve their competencies. First, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training and the universities adjust compensation policies: for instance, increase the special allowance for foreign language lecturers (analogous to the foreign-language bonus given to K-12 language teachers), and provide additional pay for teaching large classes that exceed normal sizes. Next, improve facilities: invest in additional language self-study rooms for students, stock libraries with modern English teaching materials, and equip all language

classrooms with computers, projectors, and reliable Internet access. Enable lecturers to access international academic resources (journals, books, online courses) for self-improvement. At the same time, build a positive academic culture: encourage lecturers to participate in workshops and academic clubs, and organize professional competitions (such as an annual “Best Foreign Language Instructor” contest at the university or regional level). Lastly, with regard to career advancement opportunities: establish clear pathways for promotion and leadership roles appropriate for foreign language lecturers. For example, a regional university should include foreign language lecturer representatives on its board of trustees or consider creating a vice-rector position focused on skills training (which a senior language lecturer could fill), so that these lecturers see a viable career trajectory. When the working environment provides all the “tools of the trade” and a culture of respect and recognition, lecturers will be more wholeheartedly dedicated to their work.

- 6. Foster regional collaboration in lecturer development:** Regional universities should consider forming a cooperative network for developing foreign language lecturers. For example, they could hold periodic joint workshops for sharing experiences among institutions, implement lecturer exchange programs (where lecturers serve as visiting instructors at sister institutions), or partner with major foreign language universities (such as Hanoi University, the University of Languages and International Studies – VNU, or Ho Chi Minh City University of Education) to send lecturers for observational learning stints. Such collaboration allows institutions to leverage each other's resources and creates a community so that foreign language lecturers in regional schools do not feel isolated and have opportunities to learn about successful models elsewhere. The Ministry of Education and Training can support this by creating

shared platforms, such as a national teaching competition for non-specialized foreign language lecturers, thereby encouraging lecturers in different regions to strive for excellence and gain recognition.

The above solutions complement each other and collectively aim toward the ultimate goal: building a non-specialized foreign language lecturer workforce that is sufficient in quantity, strong in quality, and balanced in structure, to meet teaching requirements in the new era. When implemented in a synchronized manner, these solutions will help remedy the current shortcomings (lack of planning, recruitment difficulties, infrequent training, low motivation), while also providing a springboard for the continued development of the lecturer team. This aligns completely with the human resource development strategies of the regional universities and the nation as a whole: improving the quality of the teaching staff, thereby sustainably improving the quality of higher education.

Conclusion:

Developing the non-specialized foreign language lecturer workforce at regional universities through a competency-based approach is both an inevitable and an urgent direction in the current context. This study has systematized the theoretical basis of lecturer development under a modern approach, emphasizing the role of identifying and nurturing core competencies. The survey of the current situation at Thai Nguyen University, Hue University, and the University of Danang revealed many gaps in workforce planning, recruitment, training, evaluation, and the creation of a supportive environment for non-specialized FL lecturers. On that basis, we have proposed an integrated model that links various human resource management functions around a competency framework, along with feasible, concrete solutions.

Implementing these solutions requires strong commitment from university leadership, well-coordinated actions among functional units, and effort from the lecturers themselves. During

implementation, it is necessary to continuously monitor outcomes, evaluate effectiveness, and adjust suited to the practical conditions of each institution. It should also be noted that faculty development is a long-term process; hence, policies must be conceived with a sustained vision to avoid a “bright start but weak finish” scenario.

It is hoped that this study provides additional scientific arguments for higher education administrators in formulating strategies for faculty development, especially for those lecturers teaching foreign languages to non-language-major students – a quiet but extremely important force for the quality of our future human resources. Successfully executing this work will help regional universities effectively fulfill their mission of raising the foreign language proficiency of the local youth, contributing to sustainable socio-economic development and international integration of the regions.

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